

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 356.

FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 26TH, 1895.

[ONE PENNY.]

THE FIRST GRAND "PIONEER" REDUCTION SALE

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON,
The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds.
OUR NEW VENTURE! Yes, Two Different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! (Copyright).
Whereas, in launching forth our New Production, THE "PRUDENTIAL" CARPETS AND HEARTHUGS, we beg to state they will have a Rich Turkish and Persian Design on one side, and on the reverse the elegant and costly designs of Wilton make. The advantage thus gained is great, as they can be utilised in various rooms at one cost. This is a valuable step in economy.

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ft. by ft.	ft. by ft.	ft. by ft.	ft. by ft.	ft. by ft.	ft. by ft.
7ft. by 9ft.	8ft. by 10ft.	9ft. by 11ft.	10ft. by 12ft.	11ft. by 13ft.	12ft. by 14ft.
8ft. by 10ft.	9ft. by 11ft.	10ft. by 12ft.	11ft. by 13ft.	12ft. by 14ft.	13ft. by 15ft.
9ft. by 11ft.	10ft. by 12ft.	11ft. by 13ft.	12ft. by 14ft.	13ft. by 15ft.	14ft. by 16ft.
10ft. by 12ft.	11ft. by 13ft.	12ft. by 14ft.	13ft. by 15ft.	14ft. by 16ft.	15ft. by 17ft.
11ft. by 13ft.	12ft. by 14ft.	13ft. by 15ft.	14ft. by 16ft.	15ft. by 17ft.	16ft. by 18ft.
12ft. by 14ft.	13ft. by 15ft.	14ft. by 16ft.	15ft. by 17ft.	16ft. by 18ft.	17ft. by 19ft.
13ft. by 15ft.	14ft. by 16ft.	15ft. by 17ft.	16ft. by 18ft.	17ft. by 19ft.	18ft. by 20ft.

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From 4d. to 4/6 per yard.

Large Box containing over 1,000
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SHORT STORIES

No. 356.]

[ONE PENNY.]

EDITED BY

C, ARTHUR PHARSON.

For the Week ending October 26th, 1895.

A Silent Witness.

"YOU see that old tumble down cottage over there?" pointing with his whip across the moor, in the direction of the sea, "well, in that very house within a month of my coming to settle down here I very nearly lost my life; it is a long story, but as we have a longish way to go, it will serve to pass the time if I tell it."

The speaker was an old college chum, who I had lost sight of for many years, until one day walking down Regent Street we ran across each other accidentally, as people do almost every day in London, which, despite its vastness, is a wonderful place for unexpected meetings.

The upshot of our conversation was a promise on my part to pay a visit to my old friend at his home in the wilds of Yorkshire, and the time having arrived the promise had been duly fulfilled.

"When I came here first," the Doctor continued, "I had no idea my stay would be a prolonged one, but now I have got used to the place and the people and I have no inclination to move.

"Needless to say, the town in which I am living has grown considerably, and if I liked I might do very well in the way of town practice, without touching the outlying districts on the moor at all. But it was amongst the moor folk that I gained my first experiences, and although one of them consisted of the awful ordeal I am about to relate to you, I have never felt inclined to take leave of them.

"And then, too, I am naturally fond of the grand moorland scenery, and the invigorating air, which blows straight across, direct from the sea; in fact, I often say my present surroundings have kept me a young man long beyond my time.

"Well, to resume my story, when I came here in 1873, the summer was just merging into autumn, and I had taken over together with the practice my predecessor's gig and a somewhat antiquated specimen of a Yorkshire cob, who if not particularly fast was accredited with knowing every inch of the moor.

"There were no regular roads, beyond roughly defined tracks, so I made up my mind to do as much walking as possible before the bad weather came on to prevent it.

"It was on one of these pedestrian expeditions that the circumstances I am about to narrate occurred. I had received a message, asking me to attend a

patient, on what was called the 'far side of the moor,' where there were some half dozen cottages occupied by men who worked in the stone quarries we passed a while ago. They had not been developed then to the extent they are now. About two miles from the little hamlet was the old cottage you have just seen, but then it was an inn, 'The Travellers' Rest,' and did not bear too good a reputation in the neighbourhood.

"The day being exceptionally fine, and my one horse having had two or three long journeys in the week already, I decided to walk; and, having slung my small medicine case on my back, started out in good time, being anxious, if possible, to get there and back before nightfall, my predecessor having been particular to urge upon me the necessity of never being out on the moor after dark, not so much for fear of any danger that might occur from evil-disposed individuals who I might encounter, but from the fact that unless thoroughly well

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acquainted with the various landmarks I should be sure to get lost, and have to spend the night in the open air.

"I do not think there would be much danger of that now, but then everything was new and strange to me, and that made all the difference.

"On my way I had occasion to pass 'The Travellers' Rest,' and I well remember how I was struck with the desolate appearance of the place, which did not seem to do much of a trade, and I wondered how the proprietor managed to eke out a living at all.

"I was not long after in arriving at my destination, and having attended to the two or three patients, none of which required any great amount of doctoring at my hands, I prepared to set out on my homeward journey in good time. As one of the cases was likely to require my services again in the course of a day or two—a young girl suffering from an affection of the eyes, for which it was necessary to use a syringe—I felt half inclined to leave my instruments behind me till I came again, but thinking I might want something or other in the case in the interval, I decided not to do so.

"At the time, my resources being limited, my stock of instruments were correspondingly so; and, instead of a proper eye douche, I had to use a large syringe, which could be regulated to throw a gentle spray, or a regular miniature shower bath; it was well for me it was so. Having given the girl's mother directions as to keeping the eye constantly bathed with warm water, and promising to call again in the course of a day or two, I set out with the springy step of a young man to do my twelve-mile tramp.

"Before I had proceeded a mile upon my way, I became aware of a peculiar cold damp feeling in the air, and, looking away seaward, I at once divined the cause—sea-fog. Within a few minutes it had made its way over the cliffs, and, rolling along in a dense volume, had soon obscured everything around; I could not, in fact, see my hand in front of me.

"Suddenly, as I was cautiously groping my way along, I found my further progress impeded by the corner of a stone wall, and it at once occurred to me that I must be at 'The Travellers' Rest.' Under ordinary circumstances I might have hesitated, but situated as I was the idea of shelter of any description was welcome to me, and having felt my way to the front door, I knocked.

"It was opened after a minute or two's delay by a man wearing a slouch hat which effectually concealed his features, and who asked me in a gruff tone of voice what I wanted. I replied that I was the new doctor who had come from Yoresley, and as I felt it would be impossible for me to make my way across the moor I should be glad if he could put me up for the night.

"His reply was not altogether reassuring. 'We ain't got no accomodation for the likes of you, but there's a shakedown in the upstairs room, and you can have that if you like.'

"'I was just going to turn in,' he continued, 'and if you don't want anything to eat—I've got nothing but bread and cheese, the missus has gone to town to-day and won't be back this weather, I'm thinking—I may as well show you your room; this way'—and taking up the old-fashioned horn lantern, the only light in the place, he proceeded to lead the way upstairs. 'Will ye have a drink?' he said, pausing at the foot of the staircase; 'if so, help yourself,' pointing to a bottle labelled whiskey—poison I thought to myself would be nearer the mark, probably—that stood on the table.

"I declined the offer, and followed him upstairs. 'I'll give you a call in the morning. What time shall I come?'

"'Oh, about eight o'clock, please. Good-night;' and without making any reply, beyond a grunt, he went down the rickety stairs.

"When he had gone—he had left me the lantern—I looked round the place in which I was to spend the night, my first object being to see what sort of fastening there was to the door.

"To my dismay I saw there was nothing beyond an ordinary latch, and that proved on investigation to be out of order!

"I had made up my mind not to go to sleep, not liking the look of the place and knowing that the house had the reputation of being visited occasionally by men who were not over particular; in fact, I had heard one or two stories of robbery and violence, and I was not inclined to add to the number; so instead of lying down on the bed I took off my great coat and put it between the blankets—sheets there were none—and putting the pillow inside the coat saw with satisfaction that anyone at first sight might easily mistake it for a sleeping man.

"You may wonder what made me so suspicious of foul play, and even now I cannot account for the feeling, or presentiment, which was borne in upon me. As events turned out, however, it was well founded.

"Having made this preparation for my safety, my next idea was, as you may suppose, to arm myself with anything that might be handy—a poker for choice—and await events. A glance at the fireplace showed me that there were no fire-irons there, and on looking round the room I saw that, with the exception of the low truckle bedstead, a nickel washstand, with a basin but no jug, and a small deal table, there was absolutely nothing I could lay hands on for the purpose of self-defence.

"When I realised my helpless position a sickening feeling of despair came over me, and I made up my mind to prepare for the worst. Suddenly I remembered my medicine case, and that in it I had my set of surgical knives—the biggest of which would stand me in good stead. With trembling fingers I undid the clasp, only to remember as I did so that that very morning I had had occasion to use a lancet for lancing a boil on a boy's neck, and that I had left the case in my surgery.

"Then the syringe caught my eye, and a plan of self-preservation, if nothing else, at once suggested itself. It was, as I have said, a powerful one, and when fully charged would throw its contents with considerable force. The next question to arise was how much acid remained in the bottle. To my intense relief it was nearly full, and, whereas, in a weakly diluted state as I had been using it for the child's eyes during the afternoon, it would act beneficially, used at its present full strength its effect would be to blind a man more or less permanently, if not altogether.

"You may be sure I did not stay to weigh the consequences of what might occur, but, inserting the nozzle of the syringe in the bottle, had the satisfaction of noticing that, as the contents were sucked up, they nearly expanded the india-rubber casing to its fullest extent.

"With a heartfelt ejaculation of relief I crouched down by the side of the bed furthest from the door, and held my breath listening intently for any sound.

"I ought to have told you that after the landlord had left me, I heard him moving about downstairs for awhile, and then all was quiet—possibly he had gone to bed after all, and my fears and suspicions were unfounded.

"Overcome by my day's exertions, I began to feel

myself actually dozing, when a sound which caught my ear, effectually dispelled any idea of sleep, a creaking of the stairs unmistakably denoted that someone was approaching.

"I had, as you may suppose, blown out the light in the lantern, but the moon had risen and the room was almost aslight as day, so that I could see the door quietly pushed back and the head and shoulders of a man appear inside; in his right hand he carried a heavy iron crowbar, such as the quarrymen use, and he still wore the slouched hat, so that I could not discern his features.

"By a supreme effort I had managed from the time I heard the first sound to breathe heavily, as if fast asleep, and, although I could plainly hear my heart beating, managed to keep up the deception, which effectually answered its purpose. For, after listening a moment, as if to make quite sure, the fellow made a dash forward to the bed, and, with both hands uplifted, brought down the crowbar two or three times in succession on what he imagined to be my head (either blow would have been more than enough to kill me, I realised), and then, just as he was in the act of bending down to make sure, and probably to do the rest in the way of robbery, I shot forth my right hand and discharged the full volume of acid immediately under the brim of his hat.

"The demoniacal yell he gave told me plainly that it had taken effect, and then the ordeal I had gone through proved too much for me, and I must have swooned away.

"When I came to myself I was alone.

"Hastily scrambling to my feet, I made my way downstairs, and there in the kitchen, lying across the table with his head resting on his arms, and an empty whiskey bottle by his side, was my late adversary. His heavy stentorian breathing showed that he was alive, and I judged that, maddened by the action of the acid on his face and eyes, he had sought to drown the pain he experienced by reducing himself to a state of drunken insensibility.

"My first idea was to get away from the place without delay, but it occurred to me that if the man recovered before I could summon the assistance of a constable (which meant several hours probably) and return, he might decamp, as he probably would, and as I had not so much as caught a glimpse of his features it would be impossible for me to swear to him. You will say I might, in his stupefied condition have easily made him secure by binding his hands and feet where he lay, but I was in too much terror of the man to attempt it, and I had recourse to my medicine chest once more; in it I had I knew a small phial of nitrate of silver, and a camel's-hair brush for its application.

"Nitrate of silver, as you are doubtless aware, although leaving no mark when first put on, turns to black if exposed to the action of the sun. Where to put a mark so as not to arouse his suspicions, should he see it, was my object, and I decided on the back of the neck.

"Carefully turning down his neckcloth, with trembling fingers I applied the preparation to the bare flesh, until a space about the size of a five-shilling piece had been covered; just as I finished the fellow gave signs of recovering consciousness, and I lost no time in making for the door.

"Once well away from the place my feelings of thankfulness for my escape may be well imagined, and on thinking over the matter I determined, as I was well

out of it, to keep my own council and not report it to the authorities, as had been my intention; it does not do a doctor any good at any time to be mixed up with police court proceedings, but as events proved, the facts came out in an altogether unexpected manner.

"Two days later I was again journeying in the direction of 'The Travellers' Rest,' driving this time, when to my surprise I observed quite a crowd round the house.

"On approaching, I asked one of the men what was up, and he informed me, as if it was a matter of no very unusual occurrence, that a man, apparently a tourist, had been found dead in the place, and the inquest was then being held.

"Anxious to hear the facts of what might have been my own fate, I went in. The landlord, whose face showed signs of the terrible ravages the acid had inflicted, was in the act of telling his story. The murdered man, a perfect stranger to him, he said, had come to the house on the preceding afternoon, and having made himself at home in the parlour, consumed a considerable quantity of spirits. When asked for payment, he declared he had no money, and followed up this statement by throwing some corrosive fluid in his face, doubtless with the idea of temporarily blinding him and thus making his escape; that he, the landlord, maddened by pain, and having in his hand an iron bar with which it was his custom to bar the window, struck at him in his impotent fury, and must have hit him on the head, although he had not, he assured the Coroner, any intention of killing the man.

"The story sounded plausible enough, and from the fact that no letters or papers had been found on the murdered man which would lead to his identification, had I not providentially appeared on the scene the verdict would probably have been 'Justifiable homicide'; but when I stepped forward and requested to be allowed to make a statement, the man's face suddenly became ashen pale.

"As briefly as possible I narrated the circumstances of the eventful night, which was evidently received with suspicion, the Coroner pointing out that it was strange I had not thought fit to report the matter to the police. I explained my reasons, but still he was not satisfied, and was about to adjourn the inquiry, when I asked that the man's neckcloth might be removed, at the same time stating my reason in a low tone of voice to the Coroner; his ejaculation of 'Good Heavens, man,' produced a visible impression upon those assembled, and he himself came forward to loosen the handkerchief.

"Where did you say?"

"Just there," indicating the spot with my finger. There was no mark visible there beyond a certain redness.

"Go over to the light, sir," I said excitedly, the sun shining brightly at the time.

"Hardly had the words left my mouth, than gradually what had been a circular red spot assumed a darker hue, and in less than a minute it had become perfectly black.

* * * * *

"The man subsequently confessed to the murder, and a careful search about the house disclosed certain of the murdered man's effects, which proved his identity.

"A month after the murderer was hanged in York Gaol, and nobody being inclined to take the house it has remained empty, as you now see it, ever since.

"Strange things happen to us doctors at times, you say—they do indeed."

PETER PARR.

GOLDEN STAR.

- - A Romance - -

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

On the eve of the fall of the Inca empire Vilcaroaya marries Golden Star, and with her drinks a potion, the result of which is a death-like trance, in hope of fulfilling the prophecy that the empire shall be restored by one who has come alive from the grave. Three hundred and sixty years later Professor Lamson brings, as he thinks, Vilcaroaya's mummy from Peru to England. His friend Djama believes that he can restore it to life, and does so. Six months later the party return to Peru, Ruth, Djama's sister, going with them. At Panama they meet Hartness, a friend of Lamson's, who joins in the expedition. Arrived in Cuzco, Vilcaroaya put himself into communication with the remnant of his people, and prepares to begin his work. He summons one Tupac-Rayca to meet him with twenty others of the old Inca blood on the Rodadero, a plain behind the great fortress. The same night at dinner he accidentally reveals the fact that Golden Star was his sister as well as his wife. It is explained to him that such a union as this is impossible in the modern world. Later on the same night he entices Djama on to the Rodadero and bids his men blindfold him. He then leads them by a way of which he only knows the secret into the Hall of Gold, a subterranean chamber in which some of the treasures of the Incas are hidden, where he dresses himself in the imperial robes, and then, seated on a throne, he receives the oath of allegiance from Tupac and his comrades. He shows Djama the treasures, and promises to load him with them if he will restore Golden Star to life, and threatens him with death if he reveals what he has seen. After this he has some of the gold taken to their lodgings, and with part of this buys a convenient hacienda in the country, and in due course they set out for the resting-place of Golden Star.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE GRAVE OF GOLDEN STAR.

FOR five long days we travelled slowly and toilfully, on our way from the valley of Cuzco to the resting-place of Golden Star. Over high plains and pleasant valleys; through deep, dark gorges and ravines, to whose lowest depths the sun but seldom reaches, and then but for an hour or two; along narrow pathways cut into the living rock on the mountain side, with precipices on one hand falling thousands of feet into the dark abysses, where the torrents roared and foamed, and on the other the great rock-walls of the mountain soaring up into the sky yet more thousands of feet above us.

I saw the mighty crests of Saljantai and Umantai rising snow-crowned from earth to heaven, unchanged in their eternal grandeur since the long-distant day on which I had last beheld them. I rode with saddened heart past the ruins of Lima Tambo, remembering how fair and stately a city it had been in the days before the plunderer and the oppressor came. We toiled slowly over the great, sharp-ridged range which parts the waters of the Vilcamayo from those of the Apurimac—the "Great Speaker"—then, descending again by the gorge of the river, which is now called the Río de la Banca, we came to the long bridge which swings in mid air from rock to rock across the chasm through which the "Great Speaker" rolls his swift, roaring flood. Its cables were loosened, and its floor-ways broken, for, like all things else in the land, the Spaniards had suffered it to fall well-nigh to ruin; and as I led Joyful Star across it by the hand, I thought of what it had been in the olden times when not a rope or a stick was suffered to be out of place, and when the Son of the Sun had been borne across it in his golden travelling litter, with long processions of his adoring people going before and behind him, strewing his way with flowers, and waking the echoes of these gloomy gorges with the melody of their songs and laughter.



We came to the long bridge.

From here we journeyed on, each night facing the setting sun, for two days more, ever winding higher and higher up into the mountains, until at length, on the fifth evening, I, riding alone many yards in front of the others, found the sign that I was looking for—a rock with three seats carved on the top of it—and turned my mule from the track and rode over the rough, stony ground up the side of the mountain until what looked from the road a single mountain peak opened into two. I beckoned to the rest to follow me, and when they came up I said to the Professor:

"Do you know where you are now—have you ever been here before?"

He looked about him and shook his head, saying:

"This may have been the place where we got off the road when one of our cargo-mules gave out, but I don't recognise it. Do you mean that we are near the valley?"

"Yes," I said. "Do you not remember seeing under two peaks from the shore of the lake near where you found me?"

He looked at them for a moment, and then said:

"Yes, I remember them, but they don't look the same, and I don't believe I could find my way back into the valley from here to save my life. It's very strange how I can have forgotten it so completely."

I smiled as he said this, knowing that I had brought them purposely many miles out of the way by which he had found the valley by accident, for I had no desire that the way should be known to any but myself, and those I had chosen from among the remnant of the Children of the Blood. Then I bade them follow me again, and once more rode on alone ahead, for, as you may well believe, I was too full of my own thoughts and hopes and fears to be in any mood for conversation, even with Joyful Star herself. They, too, talked but little, and, as we rode on in the deepening gloom amid the solemn silence and the gaunt grandeur of the mountains, their words became fewer and fewer, till at length thought took the place of speech, and the silence was broken by no sound save the patter of the mules' feet and the rattle of stones under their iron-shod hoofs.

Hour after hour I led them on, turning from valley to valley on the road that was visible only to my own eyes, and ever rising higher and higher towards the twin peaks that now stood out dark and sharp against the starry sky. At last, when our watches were nearly marking ten o'clock, I stopped before a cliff covered with bushes and creeping grasses, and, calling Tupac to me, I bade him seek for an opening under these.

He groped about among the bushes for a while, and then suddenly, with a short cry of surprise, he vanished, as it seemed, through the face of the rock itself. I dismounted and followed him, and found him standing behind the bushes facing a square doorway cut in the rock, and lined with masonry. Behind it, and closing it completely, was a great slab of dressed stone. Down the sides of the doorway were two square pillars of stone, and in the middle of the one to the left hand three little lines had been cut about a

finger's breadth apart, but so faintly that only one who knew they were there could find them.

I stretched a string across from the middle one of these to the right-hand pillar, and where the string ended in the centre of the pillar I felt with my finger-tips, and found a little circle about as big round as an English two-shilling piece. Tupac had in his hand the iron rod that I had used on the Rodadero. I took it from him, and, placing the end against the circle, told him to push with me, and, to his wonder, the rod sank, seemingly into the solid stone, forcing out a bolt of stone which had been fitted so cunningly into the pillar that the end of it looked no more than a circle traced on the pillar.

When we had pushed the rod in about six inches I bade Tupac help me to pull it round towards the door. The pillar turned on a central hinge as we did so, and the great stone slab swung back by its own weight, which we had thus released, opening the entrance to a tunnel high enough for a man to walk through erect. This tunnel sloped somewhat sharply upwards, and looking up it I could see, shining in the clear sky beyond the upper entrance, the stars that I knew were reflected in the still waters of the little lake by which Golden Star was sleeping the sleep out of which we had come to arouse her.

As the passage was not large enough for the mules to go through with their burdens, I bade my men unload them and carry their loads through into the valley. Then we followed, leading our mules by the bridle, and after us the cargo mules were driven through. The load of one of the mules was a long narrow case of wood like that in which the Professor had taken my inanimate form to London, but this was thickly and softly padded inside with wool and lined with white linen, and at one end was a little pillow of the softest down, on which the head of Golden Star would soon be resting.

As soon as we were all standing outside the upper mouth of the tunnel I looked at Joyful Star and said:

"Is not this a fitting resting-place, even for the daughter of kings? Are not the stars bright in the heavens and on the bosom of the lake? Are not the mountains great, and strong, and silent? Do they not guard her couch well, and does not the snowy peak of Umantai yonder point the straight way to the Mansions of the Sun, where the soul of Golden Star is even now waiting for the arts of your brother to call it back to earth as he called mine?"

"Yes," she said, looking about her, first at the stars and then at the vast shapes of the mountains which loomed huge and dim on every side. "Yes, Vilcaroya, it is a good place for sleep, but is not the world beyond a good place to wake in? Have you not found it so?"

I caught the gleam of her eyes in the starlight, as she looked towards me saying this, and, by the glory of the Sun, had we stood alone where we were, I should have forgotten all, save the knowledge that I was the lawful lord of all this land and that she was there in the midst of it with me. For the instant I had gone back to my old life, with all its old-world thoughts and customs, and then, before I could answer her, my dreaming soul was called back to the present by the cold quiet voice of her brother saying:



Facing a square doorway cut in the rock.

"I don't think that very many would find the world an unpleasant place to wake in, either for the first or the second time, if they could also wake up lord of illimitable treasures, as Vilcaroya here has done. But come, your Highness, and you, Professor; it is getting late. Don't you think it is time to be thinking about camping?"

The matter-of-fact words scattered my dreams in an instant, and I woke from them into the present. I bade Tupac have the animals tethered and fed, and the tents we had brought with us pitched in the most sheltered place he could find; and while they were doing this, and Djama and the others were busy seeing that the work was done to their satisfaction, I went to Ruth and said, in a low tone that trembled with I know not how many mingled passions:

"Will Joyful Star come with me and see the place where her sister and mine is lying waiting to come forth and greet her?"

"Your sister, Vilcaroya?" she said, turning her face up to me so that the starlight shone upon its fairness and lost itself in the lustrous depths of her eyes. "Do you mean your sister only—not your—"

"No," I said, "not my bride, for I have thought upon your words and pondered them deeply, and though they wounded me sorely at first, yet now I see that they were wise and just, like all the other words that Joyful Star has spoken to me. I have learned that lesson, like many others that you have taught me. That bridal of ours is already to me a dream of the long lost past, the vision of a time that is dead and a people that is no more. When Golden Star wakes, if ever she does, I will greet her as a sister and a friend, as one of my own people who has come back to me out of my own times, and she shall help me in the work that I swore with her to do; but that is all, and I will find others of the Blood who shall sit upon the restored throne of my ancestors and be the parents of the generations of Incas that shall come after me."

"What do you mean, Vilcaroya?" she said, in a voice that was half angry and half fearful. "Do you mean—no, I cannot say it—for I am sure you do not mean that."

"How could that be," I answered, guessing her meaning. "Is it not you who have taught me the ways and thoughts of the world into which I have come back? No, what I

mean is that I am not the only one now alive in whose veins the old blood of the Incas flows. Tupac yonder is the son of the son of that Tupac-Amaru who died torn to pieces in the square of Cuzco because he had dared to raise the rainbow banner in the Land of the Four Regions, and called the Children of the Sun, as I will call them, to revolt against their oppressors. He, more blessed than I, who am his lord, has both wife and child, and if the prophecy is to be fulfilled, and I reign in the City of the Sun, then I will take his firstborn and instruct him in all the lore of our people and the duties of their ruler, and if he proves worthy he shall wear the Llautu after me."

She looked up at me again as I ceased speaking—just one swift bright glance that seemed to pierce to the most secret depths of my soul and read the unuttered thoughts



For the instant I had gone back to my old life.

that were hidden there, thoughts which I did not dare to speak even to myself in the loneliest hour of my musings. Then she looked down again, and side by side we walked in silence around the shore of the lake until I stopped in front of a great black cliff that jutted out from the mountain side and hung impending over the dark still waters of the lake. I pointed into the black shadows in which its base was hidden, and said:

"There lies Golden Star, and there I lay beside her through all the long

years that were to pass from the night when I pledged my troth with her before the altar of the Sun until this night, when I stand with you, Joyful Star, a new being in a new world, before her resting-place."



"There lies Golden Star."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

"Is it really true," she said, standing still, and staring straight before her into the darkness—"is it really true that you who are standing alive and strong here beside me lay there under that great rock for all those years, while ten generations of men and women were born, and lived and died, and the whole world changed again and again; and is the Golden Star lying in there now really the Golden Star you have told me so much of, and I have thought about until she seems to me more like some living friend that I have known and loved than a dead body that has been in the grave for more than three hundred years? Is it really true, Vilcaroya, or have we all only been dreaming some wild dream like that Frankenstein story that I was telling you the other day?"

As she spoke she laid her hand for a moment upon my arm, as though to satisfy herself that I was really made of human flesh and blood, and not a phantom standing beside her in the starlit darkness.

Scarce knowing what I did, I laid my own hand, warm, and strong, and firm, upon hers. For an instant I felt it tremble beneath mine. I would have given all the boundless wealth that I knew was mine for the courage to close upon it a grasp that it could not have escaped if it would. My heart seemed to swell as though it would burst in my breast; my tingling blood ran fire, and wild words rose choking to my lips. Then her hand slipped away from under mine. Once more I saw her eyes shine in the starlight, and then I knew that I had learned the last and greatest lesson that Joyful Star could teach me.

I knew now why to think of Golden Star as my wife and my queen filled me with the same untold horror that I had heard that night thrill in the tones of her who stood beside me; for now I, the son of a lost race and a long past age, loved this daughter of the new time. For good or evil, for hope or despair, I was hers until I went again, and for the last time, into the shadows through which I had already passed, and then—yes, there he was, this tall, stalwart,

golden-haired son of her own race and her own time, whose eyes I had seen looking love into hers.

He was coming towards us round the lake with his long, easy swinging strides, this man who was already my friend, and who would one day be the captain of my armies. For one blind moment of madness I thought how completely I had him and the others in my power; of the lonely unknown valley where we stood; of the men who were already my slaves, and who looked upon me as a god. I thought, too, of the dark, deep waters of the lake, and the secrets that they held for me alone. How well they could hide others for me, too! What if Golden Star never awoke, would she not be as well lying there in the peace of her endless sleep as coming back into the world, perhaps to love in vain and to suffer as I was doomed to suffer?

The shadowy forms of the mountains began to waver and reel around me; the stars began to dance in the sky, and a red mist seemed to swim before my eyes. Then through the hoarse dull murmur that was sounding in my ears I heard the sweet, low voice of Joyful Star, saying:

"Ah, Captain Hartness, I suppose you have been wondering what had become of us! I am afraid I have been neglecting my household duties and you have been attending to them for me, but really I could not resist coming here with Vilcaroya. Look, that is where Golden Star is lying—in a cave under this great rock down there where those dark shadows are. Doesn't it look cold and lonely and eerie?"

"Yes," he answered, with a laugh that did not sound to me like his own. "But I don't suppose that matters very much now to her Highness any more than it did to Vilcaroya. But, to descend to less romantic matters, I have come to tell you that the affairs of our temporary household are already in order, supper is ready, and we are all ravenously hungry, and I suppose you are about the same. This mountain air puts an edge on one's appetite like a razor."

"Supper—yes, of course, I had forgotten all about it, thinking of poor Golden Star lying there all alone in the darkness. Of course, I am desperately hungry now that you remind me of it. Come along, Vilcaroya, I am sure you are hungry, too. Another night alone won't matter much to poor Golden Star after all these years. You can dream of her to-night, as I suppose we all shall, and tomorrow we shall all see her. Oh, how I wonder what she will be really like!"

As Joyful Star said this in a voice that was half sad and

half merry, she turned away towards Francis Hartness, and I followed her with some light words on my lips and many heavy thoughts in my heart, and we walked together to the tents, talking of the things that were to be done on the morrow.

The next morning I was afoot before the stars had begun to pale in the coming dawn. I had not slept for two hours together through the night, yet, waking and sleeping, many dreams had come to me. I had been back to the past among my people, living again that strange old life, with all its light and colour and gaiety, which was now every day becoming more and more like a vision that had been told to me by some other dreamer.



We took our lanterns and tools and went to the rock.

I had talked with Golden Star, seeking to teach her the lesson that my dear instructress of the new time had taught me, and had awakened half mad with the perplexities of my



I struck the end of the wedge.

divided love—the love of the past that was dead, and of the present that was alive. I had seen my sister-bride come forth out of her tomb to greet me wrapt in her cereclothes, with the dust of the grave in her hair and on her face. I had clasped her in my longing arms and kissed the dust from her lips, and while I yet held her in my embrace, her form had grown cold and stiff again. Then, in the agony of my sorrow, I had strained her to my breast, and, under the pressure of my arms, she had crumbled in my grasp and fallen, a little heap of grey bones and dusty garments, at my feet.

Once more I had awakened with my gasping cry of horror still sounding in my ears, and then, not daring to seek sleep again, I had risen and gone out to watch for the rest of the night before her grave under the rock. There they found me when they came from the camp at daybreak. I went back with them, and our hasty morning meal was eaten and drunk almost in silence, for we were all too busy with our thoughts to have leisure for conversation, and my friends, knowing how much that day's work must mean to me, respected my unspoken feelings, and left me to the silent company of my own hopes and fears.

Breakfast over, we took our lanterns and tools and went to the rock, followed by Tupac, and two of my men carrying the coffin-like case in which Golden Star's body was to be laid. Under the rock was a long heap of loose stones which the Professor had wisely piled up in front of the upright courses of masonry through which he had broken into my resting place. He scanned them eagerly to see if they had been disturbed since his visit, and told us that they had not. Then I bade Tupac and the men clear them away, which they speedily did, laying bare the courses of stone behind them, still standing as the Professor had re-built them after taking out my body.

A few minutes' more work opened a passage large enough for a man to walk in stooping. As if by common instinct they all stepped aside and looked at me. I saw what they meant, and, turning the light of my lantern into the entrance, I walked back, a living man, into the grave where I had lain dead while ten generations of men had lived and died. I saw the place where I had lain, for a few mouldering scraps and shreds of cloth and furs still lay where my bed had been. Then I flashed my lantern round the walls of the cavern, and on the side along which my own couch had been spread by Anda-Huillac and his brother priests I found what they had told me to seek while I was



With gentle hands put back the tresses.

preparing to fulfil the oath that I had sworn with Golden Star.

It was a wedge of stone fitted in to a crevice in the wall and left rough and jagged at its outer end, so that one who did not know its true purpose would have taken it to be nothing more than a natural projection in the rough side of the cavern.

With a mallet that I had brought with me I struck the end of the wedge softly above and below until it was loosened in its socket. Then standing to one side I struck it harder. It dropped from its place, and the same instant a part of the cavern wall swayed outwards, and fell with a dull crash across the floor.

For a moment I stood breathless and motionless on the threshold of Golden Star's grave. Then, with trembling hand, I turned the light of my lantern into the inner chamber, and as the dust that the falling stone had raised fell slowly back to the ground I saw through the particles dancing in the lantern rays the dim outline of a human form lying on a couch of skins. Still not daring to set a foot within the sacred precincts, I stood in the doorway and let the light fall full upon the figure. A glance showed me that so far all was well. No profaning hand had disturbed the peace and sanctity of her long slumber. She lay there as perfect in form and feature as she had lain beside me that night in the little chamber in the Sanctuary.

Then I thought of Joyful Star. Hers should be the first eyes after mine to look upon that dead loveliness. So I turned and went out to where they were all standing round the outer entrance, and, taking no notice of the others, replying nothing to their half-whispered questions, I went to Ruth and, holding out my hand for her, said:

"Come Joyful Star and see the sister that the Lord of Life made long ago in the image that you now wear."

She said nothing, but with a look of wondering question put her hand into mine and I turned to lead her to the entrance.

Djama with a sudden exclamation took a step forward as though he would stop her, but Francis Hartness put his hand on his shoulder saying:

"I think you had better let them go alone. There is no fear for your sister with all of us here so near, and if what Vilcaroya says is true, why should she not see her first?"

Djama drew back and we went in unchecked. I went into the inner chamber, helping Ruth over the fallen stone, and then I flashed my light on Golden Star's face and said:

"Did I not tell you truly that the Lord of Life made her in the same image as yours?"

I heard her utter a little gasping cry of wonder, and then saw her slip forward on to her knees beside Golden Star's pillow and as the light fell upon the two faces, the living and the dead, the likeness between them was so perfect, save for the lustrous blackness of Joyful Star's hair and the golden gleam of the tresses that framed my dead love's face, that they seemed to me as sisters, one watching over the slumbers of the other.

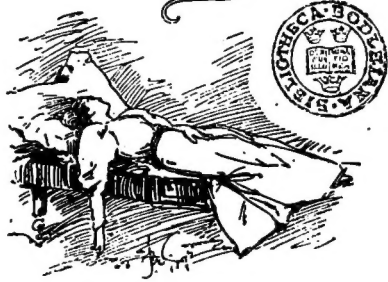
"It is more than wonderful and it is more than chance!" said Joyful Star, in a tone that was almost a whisper and turning towards me her white face and the eyes into which the loving tears of pity were already springing. "Why did you not tell me of this before, Vilcaroya?"

"Because," I said, "the arts of the priests might not have done for her what they did for me, and I might have found here that which your eyes should never have looked upon. But now, is she not beautiful, even as you are?"

The bright blood came swiftly back into her cheeks as I said this, and, without answering me, she stooped, and with gentle hands put back the tresses from Golden Star's forehead, and, bending over her, laid her warm sweet lips on the cold smooth brow that I had last seen crowned with the marriage garland in our bridal chamber in the Sanctuary.

(To be continued.)

The Strange Experience of the General's



I AM a physician, and among my patients number the wife of a deceased army officer. The General's wife was a case of nervous debility. She had, so to speak, a genius for nervousness; her body, like her soul, vibrated at a touch, like a delicate stringed instrument under a skilled master's hand. She was an excellent wife, and she adored a second husband, whom she married soon after the death of the General, whose title the world continued to give her.

She worshipped the last husband, but unfortunately, the unworthy scamp—much younger than his wife—in no way deserved the self-sacrificing tenderness and the loving solicitude with which she treated him. Whenever and wherever an inducement offered, he stole away from their elegant home, and spent the night as well as his wife's money in dissipation.

The wife's sorrow and despair were boundless, all the more as the frivolous youth, who had every reason to avoid an open rupture, knew how to preserve appearances with an inexhaustible store of evasions and excuses. He lied and cheated with the thorough adroitness and untiring attention of a man to whom fraud and artifice yielded a yearly income of many thousands.

But she put his different statements together, and discovered little contradictions—deficiencies. Then the poor woman shed bitter tears and sobbed in heart-breaking fashion, and became so miserable that she was not ashamed, under the circumstances, to consult me, her family physician and trusted adviser. At first I strove to calm her in the usual way, by lying.

But, alas! I soon saw these innocent expedients were not sufficient. So the General's wife often sat for hours in my study, crying and wringing her hands with incessant grief. One day she sat on the sofa, her head buried in her hands, groaning and moaning in agony of soul. Without design beyond trying to sooth her, I smoothed her forehead several times with my hand, and saw, to my great surprise, the sobbing woman become quiet, involuntarily let her hands fall to her side, begin to breathe regularly, and soon fall into a deep sleep.

My astonishment merged into joy, for the poor woman with her grief had become a little troublesome. Therefore, I ordered my servant to roll the sofa on which she slumbered into the next room. After a while I awakened her by blowing in her face, and told her she had slept.

"Ah!" she answered; "that has done me a world of good. I feel, indeed, that you are right, doctor. Probably I have been foolish to suspect my good husband."

She gratefully pressed my hand, and departed, hopefully smiling.

About a month afterwards, the carriage of the General's wife stopped again before my door, and the poor wife sat with weeping eyes in my study. Renewed groans, renewed tears. I told her to go into the little room. I made the same passes lightly over her brow, as on the former occasion; and she slept again in a moment. Again she awoke in a calmer state, and hastened to her husband. She repeated her calls quite frequently.

One day the General's wife came to me unusually agitated, and confessed with tears that her husband had not come home the previous night. My office hours were nearly over; my waiting-room was thronged. I gently led her into the little room, put her to sleep as usual, locked the door, and went back to my studies. My servant brought an urgent dispatch. A Brazilian prince was dangerously ill; a difficult surgical operation must be performed, and they honoured me with a request that I should perform it. The steamship would leave Bordeaux next morning. To catch the night train I must start at once. I excused myself to my patients. I quickly packed all the necessary instruments and books, bought a ticket, and soon left Paris far behind.

The train was late; the steamer was waiting for us. I was scarcely on deck before the signal for departure was sounded, and we were moving. I went at once to my cabin, unpacked my scientific works, and lost myself in reading. I thought of the great honour fallen to my share, and alternated between hope and fear as to the success of the operation. Wearied with the day's excitement, I went early to sleep, and did not wake till morning. I went on deck. The captain approached me.

"We seem to have come a good way, captain?"

"Four hundred miles," was his reply.

"And where do you intend to stop on the way?"

"Nowhere. We go directly to Rio de Janeiro. A thirty-six days' voyage lies before us." A steamer went much slower in those days than now.

"Thirty-six days!" I cried mechanically. "No trifle that, Captain; a long time—a very, very long time indeed!"

I looked thoughtfully at the play of the waves. A dark presentiment suddenly troubled me. It seemed to me as if I had forgotten something. But what could I have forgotten? What—what had slipped my mind? Suddenly I groaned aloud. Like lightning it had flashed through my head. The General's wife—the General's wife in a complete catalepsy; the General's

wife locked in the little room which my people never entered, the key of which I carried with me!

"Captain," I cried, lifting my hands imploringly, "I must instantly send a telegram!"

The Captain took two swift steps sideways and fixed his eyes on me in a singular way. He evidently believed that I had suddenly gone crazy.

"I must—I *must* telegraph, Captain," I insisted. "I have forgotten the General's wife, Captain; the General's wife who is asleep. Do you hear, Captain? She is asleep!"

"What do you mean?" cried the Captain impatiently. "If you left her asleep she must have wakened by this time!" He turned his back, laughing hoarsely, and ordered two sailors not to lose sight of me.

I need not say what a terrible day I passed. Sleeping or waking, I always saw the dreadful picture of the poor woman sunk in a sleep lying on the sofa—on the sofa from which she could never rise.

In what a state I found myself on the thirty-sixth day it would not be easy for you to imagine. At last Rio de Janeiro was in sight. I threw myself into a boat, sprang ashore, and ran to the telegraph office. "*Break open door of small room; wake up the General's wife!*"

When the dissipated husband of the General's wife discovered that she, too, had been out all night, he gave the matter no more thought than to use the favourable opportunity for another carousal.

"Is madame home yet?" he nonchalantly asked the porter, as he returned the second morning.

"No, sir," replied the porter.

The affair did not trouble him, but it began to appear strange.

The third day went by, the fourth came, and no sign of the General's wife. Her husband became uneasy. He sent to her relatives in the country. They had not seen her for years. The young man's disquiet increased from hour to hour. The fifth day he informed the police. Their search was vain. It was found that she had been to me that day, but they could go no farther. Hundreds of patients daily went in and out of my office, in at one door and out of another, which opened directly on the stairs.

My people could not remember about her, the police could not think of searching my rooms, neither did it occur to my servant to force open the small room, since I frequently locked it when I wanted to guard some valuable object, or interesting study. So the disappearance of the General's wife remained an insoluble mystery.

One believes what one wishes. So, when four days more passed, the husband was convinced his wife never would return. He said to himself, with a certain painful satisfaction: "The poor thing has killed herself! From love of me, no doubt!"

According to the marriage contract the wife's wealth now belonged to him. A skilful lawyer at once arranged everything. The young widower inaugurated his monarchy by making such alterations in the stately old house as his own somewhat loud taste dictated. His wife's boudoir was changed to a smoking-room. In place of the dining-room a museum of weapons appeared. The small blue parlour served as a billiard-room. The carriage in which the General's wife used to drive was sold and replaced by a dog-cart. She had prided herself on simple, unostentatious livery; her widower dressed his servants in red, gold-embroidered uniform.

One evening my servant was called to the door by a

stout stranger suffering from dropsy, who wanted me to cure him. Just as he was about to say that I had not been at home for over a month, a messenger ran up the steps, and handed him a telegram. My servant read it, turned pale, and cried:

"Quick, quick! Break open the door of the little room!"

The dropsical man was so frightened at the outcry that he fell in a swoon. Without troubling himself about him, my servant ran through the study, put his shoulder to the door of the inner room, and burst it in.

On the sofa lay the General's wife, covered with a thick layer of dust. Under the combined influence of t-ars, rice-powder, and dust, her face, never pretty, had gained the look of a caricature. She was an awful sight. My servant was familiar with the mysteries of catalepsy, so he wasted no time in blowing strongly in her face. She was not dead, but, of course, much emaciated. At last she opened her eyes, and made a motion as if she would have dried her tears.

"Dear doctor," said she, in a weak voice, "I feel a little encouraged. I believe I have wronged my husband. He has really passed the night at the club. I will hasten to him."

She arose and went to the door. My servant was so excited that no word passed his lips. She passed through the study. When the dropsical patient, who had just recovered consciousness, caught sight of her, he cried in horror: "Is this the state in which patients come out of the private room?" and fled as fast as he could.

The house of the lady was not far from mine. She hurried home. At the door she stopped in wonder. Was she awake? This could not possibly be her plain house. The vestibule was decorated with gay frescoes, a confusion of glaring escutcheons and bizarre flowers. Speechless with amazement she went upstairs, intending to pass through the small blue parlour to her boudoir.

There was neither little blue parlour nor boudoir. In one was a billiard table; in the other a collection of pipes!

The General's wife sank into a chair to collect her confused thoughts.

Suddenly she rose; she could hear voices near by. Laughter and singing met her ear. She hurried to a *portière*, quickly and resolutely lifted it. Horrible! Her husband sat with some ladies at a richly spread table.

The servant at a glimpse of the General's wife, who seemed to have risen from her grave, let plate and dish fall. The women fled with frightful shrieks, while the supposed widower, who had drank a little more than necessary, flung himself on his knees, and, deathly pale, stammered:

"It is her spirit! Forgive me!"

"Leave the house!" cried the General's wife. "Servants, know your true mistress, and chase this unworthy wretch from the house!"

The servants, who from fear had kept aloof, obeyed her command.

As the sorely troubled woman with great satisfaction watched them execute her order, she saw my servant who had followed her unobserved.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Madame," my servant replied, "you have slept for five weeks."

"O, fool that I have been!" she cried, with a deep groan. "When one has slept for so long a period one need never wake!"

MARY BRYAN.

A THREATENING LETTER



I WAS crossing the barrack-yard one chilly winter's night last year, on my return from a dull and formal dinner party at our Colonel's, when I met an orderly bearing a telegram.

"For you, Captain; I was just bringing it to the Colonel's."

I tore open the buff envelope and read this message:

"Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin.

"Come at once; I am dying.

"HERBERT STAFFORD."

What should I do? I must get the Colonel's permission to start by the morning train, so I recrossed the yard, leapt into a hansom and drove back. I was just in time. The last guest lingered on the threshold. Having shown my chief the telegram, my request was immediately granted.

Herbert Stafford and I were old friends and fellow officers. He and his brother were orphans, both very wealthy and deeply attached to one another. Herbert, not being of age, according to the terms of his father's will, until he was twenty-seven, was still under the guardianship of his brother Theodore, a quiet, steady-going gentleman, much absorbed in his banking business, and twenty years older than Herbert.

Everyone was surprised when his approaching marriage was announced, but Herbert was delighted.

After the wedding he returned in ecstasies.

"The bride was most beautiful," he said, "so ingenuous, so sweet, and gentle! His brother was indeed the most fortunate of men."

"But he is twenty years older than she is," I observed.

"What does that matter? They adore one another."

Shortly afterwards he went on a visit to the newly-married pair in Wicklow, where they had taken a lovely

place for the summer. I passed a fortnight there with them also, and had thus an opportunity of studying Laura Stafford.

She was certainly a lovely woman, but with a portentous kind of beauty, a certain grace of movement and fascination of manner which reminded me of Aspasia of yore, and I perfectly understand

how, for her sake, the middle-aged banker had forgotten his scripts and bonds, his loans and premiums. But within that classic form dwelt a soul of fire, of passion ungovernable, else I was misled by outward signs and tokens—the quivering lip, the sudden flashes of light in the large dark eyes, the quick flush which now and then suffused the pallid countenance.

I could not help observing Herbert's undisguised admiration for his brother's wife, and one day I ventured to remonstrate with him; but he resented my interference hotly.

"How dare you!" he said. "How dare you! Do you for one moment imagine that our intimate friendship gives you the right?" and he turned on his heel and left me.

Poor Herbert! If he had a fault it was that he was too tender-hearted, too sympathetic, too easily led.

When I reached the Shelbourne Hotel a hospital nurse met me on the threshold of my friend's room.

"How is he?" I whispered.

"Tranquil now, but he has been asking for you all night long."

He lay with his face towards me, the eyes closed, the lips slightly apart, and, save for the gentle rise and fall of the bed-covering, one would have thought him dead.



The middle-aged banker.

I sat down beside him, and placed my hand on his. He opened his eyes, smiled sadly, and muttered:

"Dick!"

"Herbert!"

Then the eyes closed, and I thought the spirit had faded; but the nurse administered a few drops of

brandy, and the fast-ebbing strength returned momentarily, and he motioned the woman to leave the room.

When the door closed behind her, I looked at him earnestly, questioningly.

"Herbert, what is the matter? What is this?" and I touched the blood-stained bandage on his bosom.

"Dick, I tried to kill myself!"

"Good Heavens! But why?"

"Because I was not fit to live—I was worse than Cain, aye, ten thousand times worse than Cain."

I understood.

"Laura!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Laura," he said faintly.

"The old story, Herbert?"

"No, Dick, not quite. In the old story it is the woman who weeps—in this case that order of things is reversed."

"And your brother?"

"He knows all now—Ah, me! he knows all—she wrote and told him—last night—but until he got that letter he knew nothing. Do not think I did not suffer before I came to this? I did—horribly, horribly. I was not fit to live. A little more brandy. Thanks, old man. I want to tell you all before I go."

He paused a moment to take a sip from the flask I had handed to him. The spirit soon revived his strength, and he was able to continue.

"I tried to free myself from the state of bondage in which I lived. My brother was exceedingly anxious that I should marry, and proposed several matches. About six weeks ago I met a girl, loved her, and wished to make her my wife, but—but it was not to be.

"Laura, from the moment that my engagement was announced, became a changed being. She feigned approval in public and loaded my affianced wife with caresses and gifts, whilst in private she treated me to scenes of violent abuse, wild threats and outbursts of fury, and from that hour we entered on a mortal struggle.

"Yesterday evening she came to my room. My brother had been hurriedly called away to Scotland, and she was about to follow him, so she came to play her last card. First she flung herself at my feet, wept hysterically, invoked the memory of our past love, and all that sort of thing; but I had learned what her real nature was, so all her arts and graces were unavailing.

"Then she became a perfect fury, threatened to kill me, flung the most horrible accusations in my face, and, drawing a sealed envelope from her pocket, she directed my attention to the fact that it was addressed to my brother.

"Here!" she said, with a melodramatic air, 'here is the admission of our intrigue. You either break off this marriage and return to me, or I post this letter to your brother, and follow it up immediately with a verbal confession.'

"Actress!" I cried tauntingly.

"She looked at me, said nothing, and went out. But she had frightened me, and I rushed to the window and watched her cross the street. She stopped when she reached the letter-box, looked up, waved the letter so that I might see what she was doing, and dropped it into the pillar."

The sad story was told, but the exertion was too much for the poor fellow, he became incoherent, then unconscious, and died just before midnight.

Theodore Stafford and his wife attended the funeral. I watched them as they stood by the grave side. He, ever gentle and considerate, seemed to suffer in seeing her tears—for she wept bitterly—and tried to comfort her, and I at once understood from his demeanour that the posting of that letter had been—a farce.

The envelope had merely contained a blank sheet of paper.

B. S. K.

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MASTER



AT

CHESS.



SULTAN MURAD was devoted to the game of chess. To say, without flattery, that he was, a good player, is to say that he was a man of considerable intellectual power. But Sultan Murad in his play had two failings; he liked to have an adequate stake on the issue of the game, and he could very ill brook defeat.

The Grand Vizier heard this proposal to stake his daughter, his favourite child, with dismay; but he knew his imperial master too well to venture a refusal.

These weaknesses are always trying, but, in the case of so powerful and absolute a monarch, they rendered the game one of exceeding danger. To lose pretty constantly meant ruin; to win too often might easily mean death. Under these circumstances it became difficult for his Majesty to find an adversary, and an invitation to contest came to have as fatal a significance, and to be as much dreaded, and, if possible, avoided, as the post of Grand Vizier had been in the reign of Selim the Grim.

So many had lost all they possessed, and some their lives into the bargain, that every high officer of state shunned, as far as possible, the dangerous honour of facing his master across a chess-board. Naturally, no official could with more difficulty escape the ordeal than the Grand Vizier himself; and, indeed, it was owing principally to this cause that so many occupants of this high post had rapidly succeeded one another during the reign of Sultan Murad.

It so happened that the present Grand Vizier was as keen an enthusiast for the game as the Sultan himself. This had been probably his chief recommendation for the office; and, being a born gambler, and of a constitutionally bold and reckless nature, he was always ready to play, counting neither the cost nor the hazard.

He played on with varying fortune, but generally losing, until he had staked and lost everything he possessed, or could scrape together.

At length, one afternoon, on the Sultan saying to

him: "Well, Grand Vizier, and what dost thou venture on this new game?" he answered ruefully: "My Padishah, except the garments in which I stand before thee, and which are thine already, there is, of a truth, no one thing I possessed that I have not staked and lost, and only by the bounty of thy Majesty shall I and Fatima, my daughter and only child, find bread or shelter, so great is the skill of your majesty at this game."

"Come, Vizier," said Murad, "if it be so bad with thee as that, I will tell thee what thou shalt do. Thou shalt on thy part stake thy daughter, and I on my part will stake the loveliest *odalisque* in my harem, and ten thousand gold pieces to boot, and we will play yet another game."

Therefore they played, and he lost. Then the unhappy father, in the bitterness of his heart, said: "Oh, Sultan, I have my head only, and that is at thy mercy, but if thou wilt on thy part stake my daughter, whom thou hast just won, I will wager my head against her!"

"Vizier," said Murad gravely, "the stakes are hardly even, but if thou wishest it, so shall it be."

And once more they played, and again the Vizier lost.

Then Murad laughed, and said: "Be not alarmed; I give thee thy last stake, for thou hast never flinched, but hast ever played boldly and well; only this understand, we have played our last game, and thou holdest thy office only until I appoint another in thy place."

After this final defeat of his courageous and indomitable Grand Vizier, Murad was hard put to it to find any suitable opponent to face him at the chess-board. All men shirked the dangerous honour, and the unhappy Vizier, commanded to undertake the duty, found it difficult to guess whether victory or defeat might prove more perilous.

At length the Sultan bethought him of a plan which seemed to promise more diversion than could be obtained from encountering those timorous and unwilling adversaries. He caused it to be proclaimed that any man might challenge his Majesty to a game of chess, the conditions being that the challenger staked his own head against the office of Grand Vizier.

To such lengths will the cupidity and self-confidence of many men carry them, that numbers were found ready to face the Sultan on these terms; but whether Murad's skill was invincible, or whether his opponents

were frightened and unnerved by the risk they ran, at any rate each succeeding aspirant lost his head instead of attaining the object of his ambition—the coveted position of Grand Vizier.

At the time of issuing the proclamation, there lived in Adrianople a family consisting of three persons—father, mother, and one son. The latter was a young man of pleasing manners, a good presence, and of remarkable energy and intellectual capacity.

The news of the Sultan's offer had reached this retired and secluded family, and the son, who had long been a devoted student of the game, had just announced to his father and mother his determination to proceed to the capital and put his life on the hazard of the event.

To this both father and mother vehemently and very naturally objected, and tried by every argument they could think of to dissuade him, but the young man would not be gainsaid, and at length he set out on his dangerous adventure.

When Osman was ushered into the presence of the Sultan, and the object of his coming explained, Murad himself felt some regret that so handsome and intelligent a youth should risk his life in a combat apparently so unequal.

After regarding him in silence a few moments, he asked him: "Dost thou understand what are the conditions of the game we are about to play?"

"If I have been correctly informed, sire," said Osman, "the conditions are these: if I win, your Majesty will appoint me your Grand Vizier; if I lose, my life is the forfeit."

"And dost thou still wish to play on these terms?" asked Murad.

"I have," answered Osman, "travelled far to seek that honour."

"But what can that fatal honour avail thee?" asked Murad, "or what benefit can accrue to thee if thou must die?"

"Hope sustains the soul," said Osman, "and makes me willing to risk life for an adequate reward."

"How long hast thou played chess?" demanded the Sultan.

"My father taught me as a boy," answered Osman, "and all my life I have loved and studied it."

"Very good," said Murad; "then at thy desire this day shalt thou play for thy life."

But first, by order of the Sultan, a sumptuous repast was served, and at his invitation Osman partook of it with him. Then, after a period of rest during the mid-day heat, the chessmen were brought out, and, amid a circle of high dignitaries and officials of the palace, the youthful stranger faced his imperial lord and essayed the difficult, and, as it appeared to all present, the foolhardy task of checkmating him.

Only five moves had been made, during breathless silence, when Osman calmly pronounced the word "Checkmate," and on inspection the fact was clearly established.

All were astonished. And the Sultan, amazed and almost stupefied, was filled with fury.

"What," cried he, "beaten, and in five moves, by a mere boy! What is the meaning of this? Say, what demon hath helped thee, or by what power of enchantment has thou been able to accomplish the feat?"

"Sire," replied Osman, "this opening of the game is a new one. Being completely unexpected, it has given me for this time the victory which I can never hope again to attain over so great and experienced a player as your Majesty."

These words somewhat mollified the Sultan, and, after having sat silent for a few minutes, his wrath being partly appeased, he said: "By whatever means the victory has incontestably been gained, and since thou must have paid thy forfeit hadst thou lost, Allah forbid that thou shouldst fail to receive the reward that I have promised."

He thereupon commanded that Osman should be arrayed in the gorgeous robes of the office, and, summoning all the officers and high dignitaries to the Hall of the Throne, he presented Osman to them as Grand Vizier.

Then, as he dismissed him, he said, significantly:

"Grand Vizier, to-morrow we will play again."

In the evening Osman sat in the official palace of the Grand Vizier, and the Reis Effendi, an old friend of his father, by his invitation, sat at meat with him, and they discussed what had passed and what was to be apprehended.

"Osman," said the Reis Effendi, "thou hast played a bold game and won it, yet I know too well the character and disposition of Murad to be able sincerely to congratulate thee. To-day thou art victorious and Grand Vizier—to-morrow thou mayest only too probably be defeated and slain."

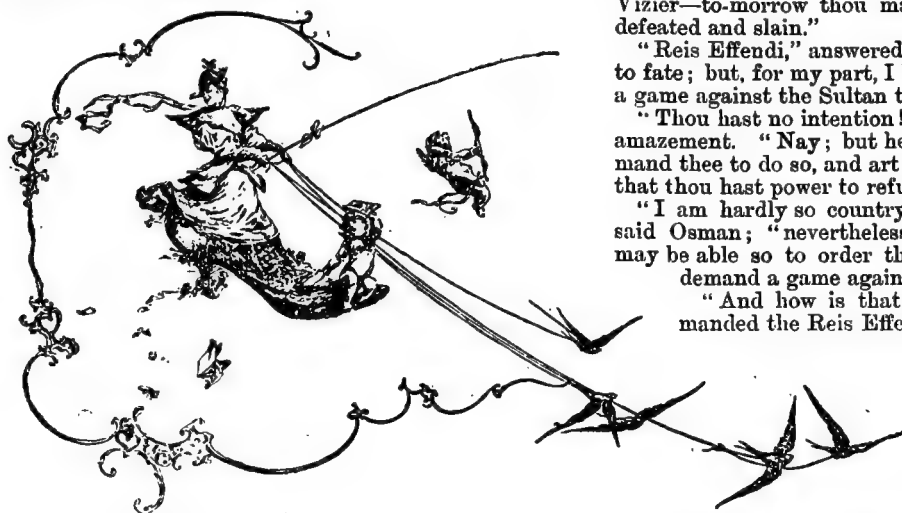
"Reis Effendi," answered Osman, "each must yield to fate; but, for my part, I have no intention of playing a game against the Sultan to-morrow."

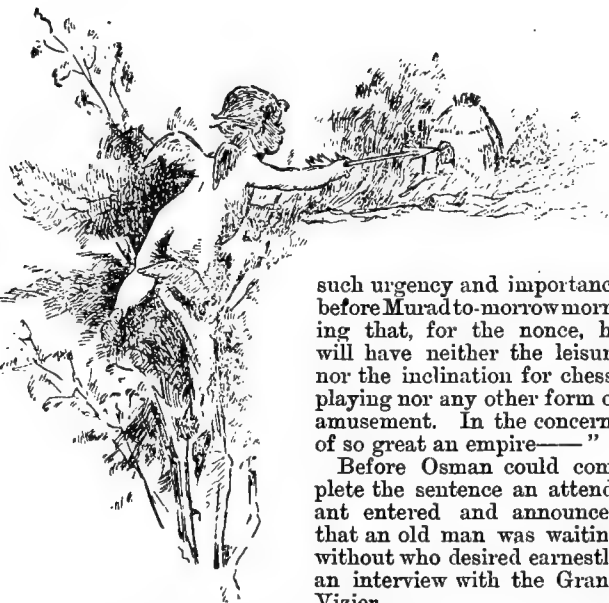
"Thou hast no intention!" cried the Reis Effendi, in amazement. "Nay; but he has the intention to command thee to do so, and art thou so simple as to suppose that thou hast power to refuse?"

"I am hardly so country bred as to suppose that," said Osman; "nevertheless I venture to hope that I may be able so to order things that Murad shall not demand a game again to-morrow."

"And how is that to be accomplished?" demanded the Reis Effendi. "What dark scheme is this thou hast in hand?"

"At present I have no scheme completed," said Osman, "but only the outline or idea of the tactics which must be resorted to. My aim must be to set some affair of





such urgency and importance before Murad to-morrow morning that, for the nonce, he will have neither the leisure nor the inclination for chess-playing nor any other form of amusement. In the concerns of so great an empire—

Before Osman could complete the sentence an attendant entered and announced that an old man was waiting without who desired earnestly an interview with the Grand Vizier.

"It is late," said Osman, "but if he be an old man, doubtless he must have an adequate reason for coming at this hour. Let him enter."

When the applicant entered the apartment, what was Osman's astonishment to behold in him no other than his own father. After having been warmly welcomed by both Osman and the Reis Effendi, the old man was pressed to say how it came to pass that he had undertaken so long a journey.

"My son," he replied, "after thy departure neither thy mother nor, sooth to say, myself either, could control the anxiety and apprehension we suffered on thine account. Therefore, having sold a ring—the last remaining valuable in our possession—in order to provide the small fund necessary for my journey, I followed thee to learn the result of thy rash attempt. Happily, it appears that thou hast won and not lost the game, yet whether thou art not still in imminent peril is much to be doubted."

"That thy son is even now in extreme peril of his life there can be no question," said the Reis Effendi. "To-morrow he must again play, unless, indeed, he can manage to divert the Sultan's attention and alter his declared intention. But in what way such a diversion is to be accomplished I cannot imagine."

"If that be the case," said the old man, "it is indeed well that I undertook the journey hither, for I bring intelligence which may now stand us in good stead. On my way I learnt by accident of a conspiracy that appears to be hatching in Roumelia, the early knowledge of which may prove of great value to the Sultan and his advisers."

"Thou art indeed fortunate," said the Reis Effendi, "to be in the possession of that information. His Majesty will doubtless be alarmed, and his attention engrossed by the details of such a project."

When, next morning, Osman, in his capacity as Grand Vizier, was closeted with Murad, he hastened to impart to him the intelligence he had received concerning the projected rising, and the design of the rebels to march upon the capital.

On hearing this account, Murad, seized with panic,

talked of raising a large army, and at once marching upon the disaffected province.

Osman, however, said calmly: "If your Majesty will permit me to express my opinion, I should say, let no man know of this conspiracy, for even the rumour of insurrection is apt to unsettle men's minds, and spread the infection of revolt. The plan of the conspirators at present is secret; let it never be declared; crush it in the bud! At this stage a very small force will suffice, even as the beginning of a fire, which, neglected, would waste a city, may be quenched with the contents of a bucket. Let me, your Majesty, take five hundred Janisaries with me, proceed with all speed to Adrianople, and two hours after my arrival, the leaders of the plot will be executed, and the movement will be at an end."

The Sultan approved this reasoning and the advice given him by his new Grand Vizier, and bade him start at once on the mission he had proposed.

Within an hour, the Grand Vizier, with his escort of five hundred men, left the capital; Osman, as he parted with his friend, the Reis Effendi, observing simply: "The game of chess is adjourned."

The Grand Vizier, on reaching Adrianople, proceeded immediately to the house of the Governor of Roumelia, and had him executed on the spot. Having also put to death several of his creatures and officials who had been guilty of the grossest tyranny and extortion, and also those who had been in any way implicated in the projected rising, he replaced, to the great joy of all, his father in his former position of Governor of Roumelia, and hastened back to report to his Majesty that the province was now perfectly contented and loyal.

The Sultan was delighted with the promptitude and energy of his new Grand Vizier. He began from this time to rely on his judgment and to take his advice on every occasion, and for a time Osman ruled the empire with unquestioned authority and conspicuous success. Murad often commanded the presence of his Grand Vizier at the chessboard; but the stakes to be played for were always fixed within the bounds of reason and moderation, and whether the game were lost or won—and Osman was too prudent often to win—the terrible claws of the imperial tiger remained sheathed in velvet.

This happy state of affairs continued some time, and might perhaps have continued indefinitely had not the Bostanji Bashi, in revenge for some imaginary slight or unintentional discourtesy on the part of the Grand Vizier, contrived his downfall. This was a task not difficult to be achieved with a master such as Murad. A few words alluding to "the policy and aims of our new ruler," which he was allowed to overhear, excited the jealousy and suspicion of the Sultan. And with him the interval between jealousy and suspicion, and the determination to rid himself of the object of them, was short indeed. He determined at once that Osman should play again for his head, and that this time he should lose.

On the same afternoon he took occasion, on winning a game, to address Osman as follows: "My good Grand Vizier, I notice that in these little friendly contests of ours you seldom win. Now, I like not to play with one who puts not out his full strength."

With a mocking smile he continued: "Possibly the stakes are now too trivial to make it worth while for you to exert your full powers. This must be remedied. I on my part will stake one of my daughters; you shall, if you win, have her to wife, and with her a dowry of two hundred purses of gold. And on your side must, I

suppose, play for the stake you played for at first, and then, you remember, you won in five moves, and easily enough."

The afternoon of the next day was fixed as the time appointed for the playing of this fateful game. During the interval Osman pondered deeply on the best course to pursue in the predicament in which he now found himself. He was in little doubt that, even though he should win this game, another equally momentous would follow, and that nothing could avail to keep his head on his shoulders if Murad had, as he shrewdly suspected, determined to get rid of him.

Yet it was clear that, under these circumstances, to win would probably be less fatal than to lose; it might for a short time delay, if it could not avert, the end that seemed inevitable. Therefore when, on the following afternoon, the Grand Vizier faced the Sultan at the chess-board, each of these good players sat down determined to win if he possibly could manage it.

They were not alone. A large number of the great officers and high officials of the state and the palace sat watching the game which might so suddenly terminate the brief and brilliant career of one of the players. Every move was followed with the keenest interest. The game was fought with great skill and indomitable patience by both combatants. It lasted long, and the chances of victory and defeat still held an even balance.

It was the Grand Vizier's turn. He moved his piece, when suddenly it flashed upon him that the move was a mistaken one. Virtually it sealed his fate. Unless the Sultan should by some extraordinary obtuseness overlook the opportunity afforded him, three moves would at once terminate the game and cut short the life of Osman. He dared not raise his eyes from the board lest his glance should involuntarily betray to the Sultan his consciousness of the blunder he had committed.

For some time the whole assembly sat silent and motionless. The Sultan made no move. What could be the cause of his delay? Was he gloating over the assurance of victory, and purposely prolonging the anxiety and apprehension of his victim, or could it be possible that he had really failed to observe the opportunity provided for him, and was still considering, undecided, his next move?

The pause continued so long that Osman ventured at length to raise his eyes to his adversary. Rather than such suspense it would be preferable to know the worst. As he looked up a strange sight met his gaze. The Sultan sat with his head bent down; the afternoon was



sultry, and at the very crisis of the battle he had fallen asleep!

There was little doubt that when he woke, the first glance must reveal the opportunity that was presented to him.

Meanwhile, none dared to disturb him, and the unhappy Osman was compelled to await, with as much patience and fortitude as he could command, the tragic and inevitable result.

No man in that large assembly either spoke or stirred. With calm, unruffled demeanour, truly Oriental, they sat silent and watchful till the Sultan should wake and deign to continue the game, which his sleep had so suddenly interrupted. Silence reigned in the court without no less than within the hall itself.

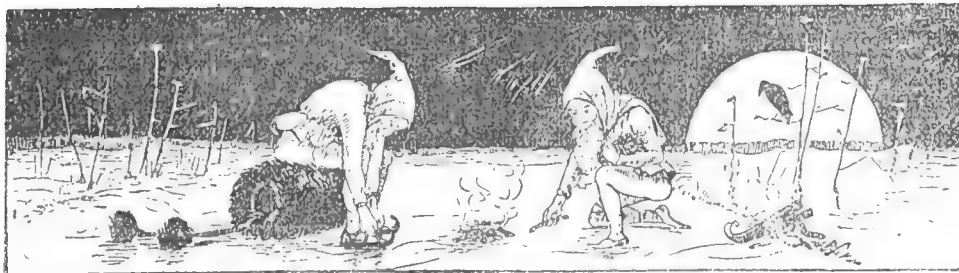
At length the call to prayer of the muezzin on the mosque resounded through the heavy air. "Come to prayer, come to prayer, God is most great, God is most great. There is no God but God." Still the Sultan slept, and no one in that bejewelled crowd dared to disturb his slumber.

At last an incident that none could have foreseen occurred to break the silence. One of the soldiers stationed at the door followed unconsciously the example set him by his imperial master, and fell asleep, and suddenly his scimitar, falling from his relaxing grasp, fell clanging on to the marble steps.

All looked up with amazement; all excepting Murad.

Then Osman rose and touched the Sultan lightly on the shoulder, and he fell forward with a crash among the chessmen—for he was dead!

H. N. CRELLIN.



WHO WAS THE THIRTEENTH GUEST?



A STRANGE STORY OF SUPERSTITION.

"It is extremely annoying," said Vernon, looking at his watch. "It is always disagreeable to a host to have a dinner delayed by one of the guests' tardiness, but in this instance it is particularly so."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because," he replied, "the number of guests is exactly fourteen, and if Sedley does not come we shall be obliged to sit at table with that most ill-omened of numbers—thirteen."

"But you surely do not believe in that old woman's superstition, do you?" cried Sinclair.

His remark jarred upon me. I am myself not of a superstitious way of thinking, but it does not follow from this that I have the right to jeer at the superstitions of others. I would not knowingly wound the feelings of an African negro by making light of his fetish. But Sinclair is not of that state of mind. A wit, a scoffer, a brilliant talker—I have noticed that these qualities may be frequently associated with an utter disregard for the feelings of others.

Vernon frowned. "Whether I believe in it or not," said he, "is not of so much importance as whether any of my guests do. I would not be willing that any man should sit at my table as one of thirteen if he thought it an ill omen. It would spoil his dinner, if it would do nothing worse. But I have no hesitation in saying that I am affected by what you are pleased to call an old woman's superstition—I am, in fact, so powerfully affected by it that I would not sit at table with thirteen for any consideration."

"Would nothing induce you to do so?" asked Sinclair, with what I considered ill-timed banter.

"Nothing," said Vernon firmly; and growing somewhat heated at the tone and smile of Sinclair, he added: "I feel so strongly on this matter that I would rather the devil himself should fill a seat at the table than sit down to it with thirteen."

"Aha!" cried Sinclair, "the devil is invited, but will his Satanic majesty come?"

While the tones of his voice were still vibrating, the bell rang. A moment later the servant announced:

"Mr. Sedley."

"Ah," said Vernon, much relieved, "here he is at last. How are you, Sedley? You are doubly welcome, for just before you came we were speculating as to whether your absence would not make it necessary for us to sit down with thirteen at table."

"I was detained," said Sedley briefly, "I ask your pardon."

There was something odd about his tone. I noticed it, and I saw that Vernon did so, too. But he replied:

"Don't mention it, old fellow. It's an accident which may happen to all of us."

But as I grasped Sedley's hand I met Vernon's eye. I don't know whether it was that or Sedley's hand which startled me. But if Vernon's look was peculiar, Sedley's hand-grasp was even more so. It was clammy, snake-like—ugh! I can remember it still.

We repaired to the table, and it was my lot to sit opposite to Sedley. Beside me sat Sinclair. But although he seemed in unusual spirits, and was more brilliant even than was his wont, the conversation flagged. There seemed to be some spell upon us, for all the guests were good fellows, and, as a rule, at dinner parties where there are no ladies the merriment is apt to be unchecked.

Yet it was so. As for myself, whenever I attempted any sally, I would catch the eye of Sedley, and it invariably exercised an unpleasant effect upon me. I could not divine the cause. Ordinarily Sedley was as jolly a fellow as you would find in a day's ride, but to-night—well, I couldn't understand it. I gave it up, and devoted myself to my dinner.

As if to complete the ill-fortune of the evening, the conversation persistently rolled on thirteen. The various superstitions with that number were discussed, and they were many. It seemed from the amount of curious lore brought forth by this discussion, that the evil properties of the number are by no means confined to the table.

"It is said of the Turks," remarked Sinclair, as he sipped a glass of sherry, "it is said of the Turks that they consider the number thirteen so unlucky that they have almost expunged it from their vocabulary. They substitute for it the word *ziyadeh*, which is a sort of invocation, like that used by the Italians against the evil eye."

"So it seems, then," remarked Vernon, "that the prejudice against thirteen is not confined to the number of guests?"

"By no means. Yet that superstition is a widespread one. As everyone knows, its origin is generally attributed to the Last Supper, at which there were thirteen—Christ and the twelve apostles—and from which

Judas, with the Saviour's words of accusation still ringing in his ears, went forth to deliver up his master to the death. But the superstition is in reality much older. In the ancient Norse mythology, when the gods sat down to feast with Loki in the Walhalla, Baldur was the thirteenth at the board, and Baldur had to die. The same fallacy holds, I believe, in the vulgar superstition of to-day; those who believe that it is unlucky to sit with thirteen at table, also believe that the last man to seat himself will die before the year is out."

Sedley lifted his head, and fixed his eye on Sinclair. I had never noticed what extremely unpleasant eyes Sedley had. They were cavernous, piercing, green eyes, and there was a sinister gleam about them that night which actually made me uncomfortable. But apparently not so Sinclair.

"The vulgar superstition, you say?" began Sedley. It was the first time he had spoken, and involuntarily a hush came over the table. "The vulgar superstition, you say? Do you not believe it, then?"

"Believe it? No!" sneered Sinclair. "It is an old wives' tale. It is fit only for the consideration of children and old women."

"By the way," said Vernon, looking round the table with an attempt at pleasantry, "who was the thirteenth man to sit down to-night?"

"Ay," added Sedley, in a tone which deprived the remark of all pleasantry, "who was the thirteenth man?"

We all looked round the table, and, as if by one accord, fixed our eyes on Sinclair.

"You were the thirteenth man, I believe, Sinclair?" said I.

"Yes, yes, it was Sinclair," came from every side.

Really, we were looking at him with a solemnity which was as absurd as it was amusing. Sinclair felt it, and endeavoured to remove the uneasy feeling which lay upon us by some witticism; but the jest fell flat. Its effect was not added to either by Sedley, who looked at him fixedly for some moments, and then said pointedly:

"So you were the thirteenth man to sit?"

"Yes; and what of it?" retorted Sinclair rudely. He was losing command of himself. "What does it matter to you?"

"To me—not at all. To you—perhaps much," was the strange reply of Sedley.

After this remark there was nothing to be said. The gaiety, if there were any, was hopelessly gone, and after a gloomy cup of coffee and a funeral cigar, the party rose; but instead of repairing to the smoking-room with the rest of us, Sedley declared that he must go.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked Vernon hospitably.

"I have something to attend to which cannot wait," he replied. "I beg you to excuse me. You know I would not leave the gathering were it not compulsory; but I must leave you. I am waited for." And as he pressed Vernon's hand, I saw, by the peculiar expression of the host's face, that he had noticed the same odd feeling in Sedley's hand that had struck me.

Sedley turned to Sinclair.

"Good-night, sir," he said. "I hope you may come to have more toleration for the superstition of others. Good-night; we shall meet again!" And as he took Sinclair's hand in his, I saw that the same strange feeling which had struck Vernon and myself was pervading him.

"Confound the fellow!" cried Sinclair, when the door was closed behind the gloomy guest. "He's a nice one to have at a convivial gathering. He reminds me of those cheerful Trappists, one of whose customs is to have a little friar at every meal, whose duty it is to say at intervals: 'Brothers, we must all die.' Good-bye and good riddance. May the devil go with him!"

The words clung to me: "May the devil go with him!" The devil? A strange farewell, truly, to a departing guest.

One of the first men I went to see on my return was Vernon.

Six months had passed since the evening of the disagreeable dinner I have described. Family matters had called me from the city the very day after it took place, and they had been of such a nature as to keep me away a much longer time than I had anticipated. I had heard nothing, or next to nothing, from home since my departure. One of the very first things that teaches a man how little his friends care for him is their utter indifference to him the moment his back is turned.

Well, as I said, I had been away for a long time, and knew nothing of what had been taking place since my



departure. One of the first men I went to see on my return was Vernon, and I besought him to tell me the news.

"News?" said he; "news? I know of nothing. It seems to me that you are the one to tell the news—you who come from the outside world. We here have been leading our everyday humdrum existence, with nothing to chronicle and nothing to tell."

"Nothing to tell!" I exclaimed. "That is always the cry of him who stays at home. He does not realise that everything is of interest to the wanderer—everything—scandal, births, marriages, and deaths."

"Deaths—yes," said he thoughtfully. "You speak of deaths. Of course you know that Sinclair is dead?"

"Sinclair dead?" said I. "You amaze me. Why, he was a young and vigorous man, and the last I saw of him he was in the most robust of health. Of what did he die?"

"The doctors called it pneumonia," replied Vernon, with a short cough.

"Pneumonia—well, well. They say it is the bane of civilisation; that our heated rooms, carelessness in exposure, and ways of living encourage it. Yet true it is that our grandfathers scarcely knew of it. So Sinclair is dead. Poor fellow! Why, it seems but yesterday I saw him in the heyday of manhood. Let me see—when was it that I saw Sinclair last? Why, it was at that dinner you gave, the day before I went away."

"Yes," assented Vernon, "it was an unfortunate dinner. I shall never forget it. Of course you know that Sedley is dead?"

"Sedley, too?" I cried, more shocked than I cared to show. "No, I knew nothing of it. What was the matter with him? When did he die?"

"Why, he died the day after you left the city—the day after the dinner, you know, or the night before," added Vernon gloomily. "I'm sure I don't know. There was some talk concerning it. It was very extraordinary."

"But tell me about it," I said; "I am entirely in the dark. I know of nothing that has taken place since my departure."

"Well," said Vernon uneasily, "I am sure I don't like to talk about it, for it's a very strange affair. If a man discusses it seriously he feels queer. You remember the dinner, of course?"

"I remember it very well."

"Well, you remember the strange manner of Sedley, his late arrival, his altered demeanour, and his clammy hands? I can feel the corpse-like clutch of his hand in mine yet." And Vernon inspected his hand uneasily, as if he expected to see marks upon it.

"Yes—go on."

"You know, too, that he and Jack Sinclair had some wordy sparring, in which Jack didn't come off best, as he generally did. I don't know that Sedley said it in so many words, but he certainly left the impression on most of our minds that Jack was going to die before the year was out."

"I remember."

"The party broke up in short order after his departure, and all went home feeling rather blue. You can, perhaps, imagine our feelings when we heard next day that Sedley was dead."

"Sedley dead? But how—why——"

"Well, I suppose it was apoplexy—that's what the doctors called it. He was a bachelor, you know, and lived alone, with the exception of his servant. The man never stayed up for him when his master went out, but got things in readiness for his going to bed, then went to bed himself. The morning after the dinner Sedley was found lying on the floor dressed as if for dinner, and stone dead. He had been dead for hours—the corpse was cold."

I looked at Vernon curiously. "You say dressed as if for dinner. You mean dressed as he had been at dinner."

Vernon rubbed his nose in hesitation. "Well, I don't know," he said reflectively, "I suppose so. At all events, he was in his dinner dress. And he was dead."

I looked at him keenly. "You haven't told me all, Vernon," I said.

"That's all there is to tell," said he. "Unless it be for an absurd notion that poor Jack Sinclair got into his head."

"And what was that?"

"Well, of course, Jack was ill, and sick men are not responsible for the hallucinations which afflict them. But the notion Jack got was this. You see he remembered some foolish speech that I had made before the dinner in regard to being willing to have the devil himself make up the fourteen rather than sit at table with thirteen."

"Yes, I remember it."

"Most of those who were there remember it," said Vernon meditatively. "I wish their memories were not so good. Well, Jack took it into his head—but it's too absurd an idea to even think of seriously."

"Let me hear it, none the less."

"Before Jack died he said to me: 'Vernon, old boy, I'm afraid your wish came true.' 'What wish?' said I. 'You wished that the devil might come to your table rather than thirteen should sit there. *Vernon, the devil came.*' 'Nonsense, Jack,' said I, 'you're wandering; it was Sedley who came.' 'No,' said he, 'it may have been Sedley's body, but it wasn't Sedley's soul. Vernon, I tell you that Sedley died that night *before*, and not *after* dinner, and the fourteenth guest who sat there was the devil. I was the thirteenth. Vernon, and that's what's killing me.' 'Pooh!' said I, thinking to humour him, 'you're not going to die. Besides, that nonsense about the thirteenth man doesn't apply to you anyhow, for there were fourteen of us.' 'Fourteen guests—yes,' said he, with a sickly smile, 'but only thirteen men. Vernon, *it was the devil I was disputing with, and he's got me.*' I saw it was useless to attempt to cure him of his delusion, and so I left him. And that was the last time I saw Jack Sinclair alive."

JEROME HART.



✧ YOUNG ✧ TOMMY. ✧



SHE was very, very beautiful—in fact, so exquisitely beautiful that Tommy Rogers—Young Tommy Rogers, as he stood in the corner near the piano and watched her, thought he had never seen a more beautiful girl in all his days. And because those days, in the eyes of the world, had not been numerous—he was just twenty—he was no less in earnest, or less sincere in his adoration of her.

All the winter long she had been as much a central figure as girls get to be central figures in Society, for added to her own natural grace and manner, four years abroad had brought out every hidden charm of voice and feature, and had taught her to hide any little imperfections she may have possessed with artless art; and now, at this last dance before Lent, she seemed more than ever the belle whom men sought and women hated—as we are apt to seek or hate, according to our sex!

But though she had had admirers all her life, and she was more than twenty—a good five years more—she could not have had a more devoted adorer—lover—slave—than Young Tommy. He knew this was so, because no one had ever loved anyone as he loved her—or made such an ass of himself over a woman who did not think twice a day of him, as his more experienced elder brother told him.

And now, true enough, with men three-deep about her, and only an occasional gleam of the white neck and shoulders, or a glint of the rich yellow hair showing now and again between them, she was holding her court there by the window like the queen she was, and Tommy was not in or out of that court. "Why was he not?" demanded Young Tommy. "Well," said the elder brother, raising his eyebrows in a bored way, "because Tommy was young—too young, in fact."

Thus it was always; his greatest fault was his youth, and poor Tommy sometimes grew so desperate that he would threaten to blow out his young brains and lie in his grave until he was old, if it would have helped matters—which was not a pretty speech, from one point of view. So to-night when the elder brother impressed this upon the youth once again, it made Tommy feel so tired of everything, including the elder brother himself, that he thought he would go home.

It took him some time to make up his mind to do so, but at last he did, and keeping his eyes straight before him, lest he should catch a glimpse of her through the courtiers gathered about her, he marched straight for the door, wishing in his raging young heart that he might take those older men out, one at a time, and murder them by inches, for being old.

But he had thought himself stronger than he was, and at the door he turned for a last look of her, and a hot wave of surprise and glad surprise at that went over him. She was alone! Not a man near her; the three-deep court had vanished like snow in spring time, and the one or two solitary looking men in the room evidently did not know her. In a moment he was by

her side, and she was letting the fine light in her fine eyes through the long lashes straight into his callow soul, while she told him how glad she was to have him near her again.

"I grew so tired of the other men," she said softly, "and so I sent them away—all of them—a moment ago, for I wanted you."

And poor Young Tommy's heart beat so fast at these words, whom no one in the world save Young Tommy would have heard seriously, that it was all out before he realised what he was saying, and there with the two or three solitary looking men grumbling commonplaces at each other at the further end of the room, he asked her to marry him.

Just the slightest tinge of additional colour crept into her delicate cheeks as he paused, but she smiled gently—a quiet, self-possessed little smile it was, too—and Young Tommy felt his heart, beating so happily a moment before, sink into his patent leathers again.

"It is very sweet of you, Mr. Rogers!" she said slowly, "and I am proud, as any girl would be, of having won your love, but—but—" she went on, with just the hint of vexation in her sweet voice, "think a moment, dear boy; how old are you?"

And with a groan that he could not have suppressed had there been a hundred men in the room, he got up and found his way into the conservatory, deserted now, as all well-behaved conservatories are, when one wants to be alone, leaving her there with the solitary men.

Half an hour later he heard whispering voices from the other side of the row of great palms, and raising his dejected head from his hands, his eyes fell upon the beautiful face he was so industriously endeavouring to blot out of his heart and mind. And because it was the last look, the very last look, he would ever have of her, he did not move for a moment, but let his boyish eyes drink in for that last time, the, to him, cruel beauty of her face, until—

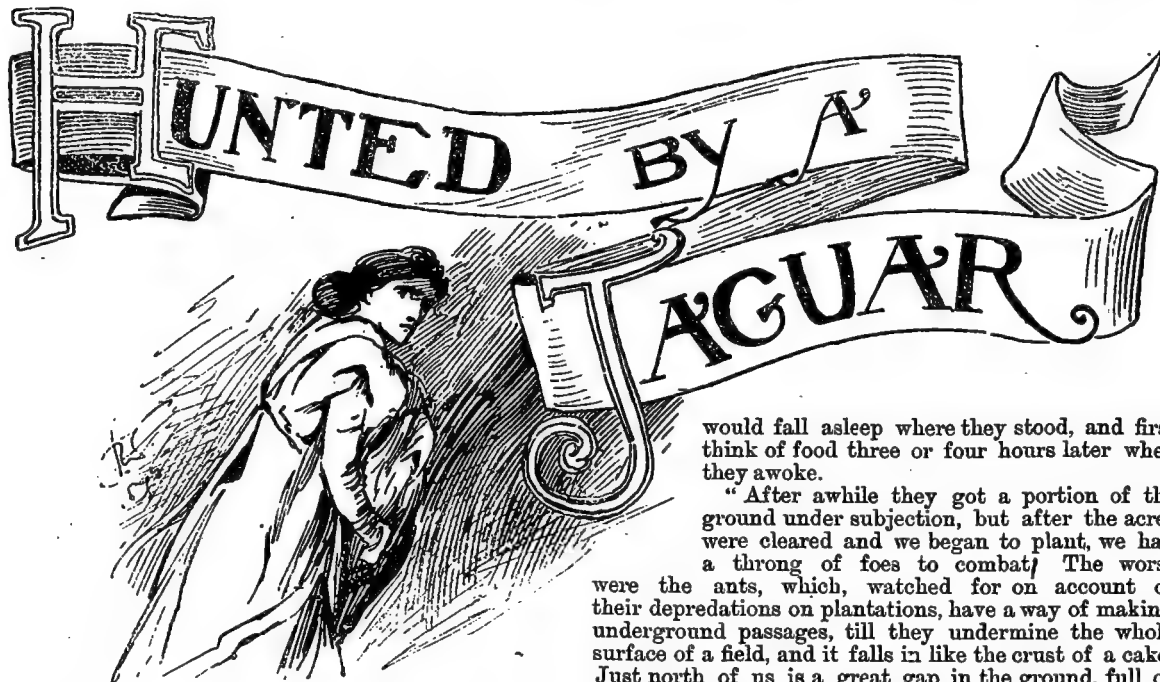
"My love, my love!" It was not she who spoke; the voice was a man's, and the next instant Young Tommy saw him stoop and take her in his arms, and as her own white arms slipped about his neck he pressed kiss after kiss upon the white neck and red lips so close to him in an ecstasy of delirious happiness. And the man's wife, who stood talking with the hostess in the big room across the hall, wondered if it were not time for them to be going home to their little ones.

In another moment they were gone, and Tommy was alone again, his head in his hands. At the end of another half hour he rose slowly to his feet and shook himself together.

"Yes," said he, in answer to some inward thought, but without the shadow of a smile playing about his drawn lips, "yes, I am young; too young, thank Heaven, for that!"

Then he went back into the drawing-room.

EVERARD APPLETON.



THE ranch of Señor Diaz was on a charming slope, overlooking the broad, smooth waters of one of the tributaries to the Parana, on whose opposite shore the rank grass grew ten and twelve feet high. The house itself had a tropical character; it was Spanish-American, with a cool, shady verandah, a long, low front, painted walls and latticed windows, a spacious court, and a flat roof, provided with a parapet, which gave the whole structure the appearance of a fort. Many acres of cultivated land showed long lines of sugarcane and tall trees laden with bananas, in surprising contrast to the dark, impenetrable mass of wild bush-land which surrounded the settlement in the farther distance.

Señora Diaz was one of the tropical beauties of whom Murillo dreamt.

"I am going to test your gallantry," she said, coming out on the verandah where I sat, "by asking you to help me water my flowers, for with my lame hand it is not easy for me to lift the heavy watering-pot."

"I am at your service; but allow me—am I wrong?—to remind you that you promised me the story of how your hand was hurt."

"Certainly. As soon as the flowers are watered, we will have coffee on the verandah, and you shall hear all about it."

Accordingly, I was shortly sipping coffee with the little Lolita, my host's only daughter, and my pet beside me, while her mother rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and began as follows:

"When we first came here, years ago, it was a very different looking place. The wild bush-land reached to the edge of the water, and was such a dark wilderness of thorns, brambles, palms, wild fig trees, and other tropical vegetation, that I did not dare venture to its depths. But my husband and his workmen went manfully to work, felled trees, uprooted stumps, made hedges and ditches, all day long, except in the severest heat, and I often saw them come home so wearied that they

would fall asleep where they stood, and first think of food three or four hours later when they awoke.

"After awhile they got a portion of the ground under subjection, but after the acres were cleared and we began to plant, we had a throng of foes to combat! The worst were the ants, which, watched for on account of their depredations on plantations, have a way of making underground passages, till they undermine the whole surface of a field, and it falls in like the crust of a cake. Just north of us is a great gap in the ground, full of bushes and wild grass, with here and there some rotten timber, where a whole settlement sank from the ants undermining the foundations. From this comes the saying we have in Paraguay that our worst enemies are the Indian braves and the Indian ants.

"Luckily, the only Indians were friendly ones, who exchanged all kinds of provisions, especially dried meats, for knives and brandy. We poisoned the ants, dug up their nests, flooded their passage ways with boiling water, and so in a great measure were free from them, although they now sometimes come from the woods to attack the plantation.

"One morning, just as we were at breakfast, one of our herdsmen brought the news that our cattle, which grazed in the tall grass on the other side of the river, had been attacked by a jaguar that had killed one of the bulls. The man who told us escaped with his life, yet he would have scarcely done so if he had not misled the beast, or had there not been a fat ox there.

"A week passed without a new alarm, and we had come to think less about it, when suddenly three or four Indians rushed in to tell us that a great jaguar had broken into their camp and killed a woman and one of their dogs. When my husband heard the story he concluded that it was the same animal that had attacked our bull, for the Indians described it as a creature of singular colour, far lighter than any they had seen about there, so they named it "The White Death." We all thought it high time to do something, and my husband called his people together to go out and hunt it.

"I remember that morning distinctly. They went away cheerfully enough, each man with his gun and hunting-knife, and Moro, the bloodhound, was with them. My husband turned round just as he entered the wood and kissed his hand to me; then he vanished into the forest.

"When I found myself with Lolita alone in the house, and thought of what might happen if they met that terrible wild animal, such anxiety seized me

(although I never thought I could be in danger) that I could not be contented till I had locked every door in the house; and then I seated myself in the great drawing-room, took Lolita on my lap, and tried to tell her a story.

"Suddenly I heard a scratching along the roof, and then a dull thud, as if something had fallen. Anxious and nervous as I was, I started up with a cry, although I had no presentiment what it was. The next moment I heard just over me a sound which I could not mistake—a long, passionate roar, that I often heard from the woods at night, and never without feeling as if my heart stood still. The thought rushed through my mind, 'the jaguar.'

"I shall never forget that moment! One minute I was quite rigid and helpless, as if life had departed, and then a thought flashed upon me; the jaguar was not to be kept off if he penetrated here from the roof, for most of the inner doorways had only draperies. In my dining-room was a great wooden meal chest, nearly empty, and large enough to hold six or seven persons at once. If Lolita and I could get there, thought I, we are safe.

"I seized the child, ran with her into the dining-room, and crept into the chest. Unfortunately it had a spring lock, so that I was forced to hold the lid open with my left hand to guard against its locking and immediately stifling us; but it had more than an inch of outer rim, which completely hid my fingers.

"It was not a moment too soon. We were scarcely hidden when I heard the great claws scratching along the floor, and the hungry sniffing of the jaguar showed me that he was in search of food. He came straight to the chest, and paused a moment, as if he feared a trap. Then he put his head close to the small opening, so that I could feel his hot breath. He sniffed awhile, and then tried to raise the lid with his paw.

"How I trembled! But, thank God, the great paw would not go into the narrow crevice, and I held the cover fast by clinging to the inner part of the lock with

all the strength of desperation. All he could do was to stretch out his tongue and lick my fingers, until they bled as if they had been scratched by a saw. And then, as he tasted blood, and heard Lolita cry (for my poor darling was just as frightened as I was), his eagerness increased, and he began to make piercing yells, which sent icy chills through me.

"I wonder why the fright did not kill me; but the touch of Lolita's little arm round my neck seemed to keep up my courage.

"Still, the worst was yet to come. When the jaguar found that he could not reach me from below he sprang upon the chest. His huge weight crushed my fingers between the two parts of the lock. Then I thought all was over, and uttered a shriek that rang through the whole house.

"But my cries were answered by a sound which made my heart throb with joy—answered by the barking of our bloodhound. The jaguar heard it, too, for he sprang down, and stood a moment listening, then ran to the door as if to flee.

"Again came the sound of the dog's bark—this time nearer—and at the same time the voice of men calling to each other. Contrary to expectation, they were already coming back. Meanwhile the jaguar seemed to be bewildered, and ran wildly to and fro. Suddenly a loud cry came from one of the windows, and then two shots and a fearful howl. Then my husband's voice anxiously called:

"'Cachita, where are you?'

"I could just get out of the chest, drag myself to the door, and let my husband in. Then I swooned away. They told me afterwards that our bloodhound found the jaguar's trail, leading straight back to the house, and they all hurried home, fearing harm would come to me.

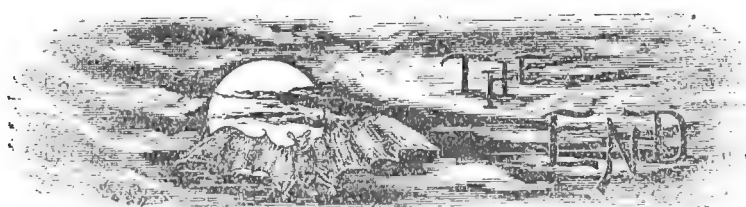
"My husband and José came on ahead, and shot the jaguar through the window.

"I could not move a joint of that hand for many weeks afterwards. The Indians gave me medicine to heal it, and they say that after awhile I can use it again. I did not need this injury to make me remember that day. If I were to live a thousand years I could not forget the terrible moments I spent in the chest."

E. F. DAWSON.



Her mother rolled a cigarette.



MADAME DELILAH.

"**T**HAT at least is certain; it will mean a baronetcy for me."

Percival Dufferin swung round leisurely in his chair as he spoke, and pressed an electric bell at his elbow.

His servant, coming in a moment later, found him leaning back with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and the tips of his fingers lightly pressed together. There was a look in his face which even the man noticed, a look of one who was lifted up, whose whole being was pervaded with the intoxicating ether of sublime contentment.

From this position he did not move. His eyes followed the servant as he placed the silver reading lamp on the table, drew the heavy curtains across the windows, and finally removed the tray of tea things which stood neglected where they had been set down half an hour before, but his mind was far away in some distant dreamland.

A glance round the cosy room, lit up with the soft effulgence thrown by the yellow shade of the lamp, was sufficient to reveal that the owner was a man of expensive and artistic taste. Yet the whole place was in orderly confusion. The desk at which he sat was littered with proofs and books; there were books on the floor and books on the seat of every chair within reach of his arm. Most of these volumes were uncut.

Percival Dufferin, poet, critic, and reader to the publishing firm of which he was a partner, was, perhaps, the most conscientious worker in London. His face, handsome always, was almost beautiful at this moment. The brown eyes were sparkling, and the well-formed mouth was parted in a smile which seemed to express unfathomable depths of happiness.

Although still early, he was in evening dress. The tail-coat, however, had been discarded for a well-worn smoking jacket, emblazoned on the pocket with the Magdelene arms; while a box of cigars lay open on the table before him.

"Yes, a baronetcy," he repeated to himself, coming suddenly to an upright position. "How pleased Gwen will be!"

He bent forward as he spoke, and opened one of the drawers of the bureau. The manuscript of a novel lay inside neatly tied with pink tape. It was type-written, but on the uppermost sheet was scrawled in a running hand:

"Madame Delilah," by H.R.H. Prince —, and then followed the name of the illustrious author.

So immersed was he in his contemplation that Dufferin did not hear the door open, and it was only at the sound of the soft *frou frou* of a woman's skirt which made him look up quickly, and then spring to his feet with a little exclamation of delight.

"Gwen!"

"Val!"

She cast a quick glance round the room, and he went forward to meet her with outstretched hands.

"I thought I must come up for a moment," she said rather breathlessly. "You are not busy?"



"Never, when I have you to idle with," he answered softly.

Her white fingers lay in his for a minute, and then he turned and swept a pile of books from an easy chair, wheeling it up to the fire for her.

"I must not stop," she said, with another quick glance round the room. Yet she did not resist as he bent over her to remove her cloak, only her hands trembled a little as they rested on his arm.

He carried the wrap across the room, poked the fire into a blaze, and came back to where she was standing in her shimmering white silk dress and the ostrich plumes of her fan pressed against her cheek. Dufferin noticed a subtle perfume in the room. It was a scent he loved, the scent of violets, which somehow he always associated with her in his mind.

"Are you glad to see me, Val?" the girl asked. She had sunk into the proffered chair, and her blue eyes looked up half coquettishly into his handsome face.

"Gwen, when you are not with me life becomes merely existence."

He spoke passionately, and then with a restless movement he turned round and laid his fingers on the mantelpiece, and stared down with unseeing eyes at the leaping flames.

The fan which lay across the girl's knee trembled a little.

Gwendoline Mallow was a girl whom men call beautiful, and women, with a shrug of their shoulders, good looking. She made a lovely picture in that dim ruddy light as she sat in the depths of the low roomy chair, such as a man delights in. The rippling hair was brought down low over the forehead—so low that only a glimpse of white skin showed over the delicate arch of the eyebrows. Her eyes were bluest of blue, large and rather expansive. Her features small and regular, and

the bright colouring lent a certain piquancy to the face. Yet the smiling lips had a dangerous tendency to fall in sarcastic curves at the corners; there were times when the tender expression melted away till the mouth became stern and almost cruel.

A moment passed in silence, and then the man spoke again without changing his position. There was a palpable tremor in his voice:

"Gwen, how long have you been engaged to Sir Henry. How long has this miserable farce been going on?"

There was a disdainful shrug of the pretty shoulders.

"I don't know. About three years, I suppose. It seems an interminable time."

"And yet you are going to make it an eternity. You are going to marry him in spite of everything?" He turned now and faced her. A subdued light was burning in his eyes, and his hands were clasped together.

"I suppose so!" Her voice sounded hard and indifferent. Yet she was nervous and agitated, far more so than he, who could only judge by the outward appearance, had any idea.

"You see," she went on, "this engagement has been published, as it were, on the housetops! It cannot very well be broken off. Besides, a woman must marry some day."

She had risen with the evident intention of going, and stood for a moment with her hands outstretched towards the fire. Her heart was beating fast, and the long white arms trembled a little.

"There is no law against her marrying the man she loves," observed Dufferin drily.

"Perhaps he has never said a word that could be construed into a proposal of marriage. It would be rather venturesome for a woman to set her heart on that before he had ever asked her to be his wife."

Just for a moment a sudden light came into the man's face. Was it possible that she meant all that her words conveyed? He hesitated a moment and then his countenance fell.

"It's all very well for you to cast that in my teeth," he said with sudden warmth. "Yet you know why I have never spoken; you know that your ambition is too great to be content with any husband who could not give you a title."

"That goes without saying, of course," she said lightly.

But she was dreadfully angry with him all the same; more angry, perhaps, than she had ever been in her life.

Dufferin, however, did not notice the ominous compression of the lips. To him there was nothing extraordinary in such an aspiration. In Miss Mallow's place he would certainly have played his cards to become "My Lady."

He came a little nearer to her and placed one of his hands on hers as it lay outstretched on the mantelpiece.

"Gwen," he said passionately, "suppose that I was to win a baronetcy, would you marry me then? For God's sake have pity on me."

He stood before her with bowed head.

Outside they could hear the dull roar of the Piccadilly traffic; the rumble of wheels; the thud of the horses' feet on the slippery wood; the shrill voices of the news-boys.

There was still anger in the girl's heart. Yet she felt that she was powerless before this man; her body and soul were his.

At last she spoke.

"That would certainly make a difference," she said deliberately.

"Then you will marry me?" cried Dufferin eagerly.

"You are not a baronet yet," she replied with a rippling laugh.

How stupid he was!

It was then that there came back to his eyes that look which had given a sort of sublimity to his face earlier in the evening. His joy was almost too great to be contained.

He went across the room to his desk and laid his hand on the open drawer.

"In here," he said, "is the manuscript of a novel called 'Madame Delilah,' by Prince —; that is enough for me."

Miss Mallow came across the room to his side. Her blue eyes were opened wide with amazement.

"But surely you don't mean that you will get a baronetcy for publishing a book just because it is written by a member of the Royal family?"

"Not in the ordinary way, perhaps. But, in the first place, this is the utmost twaddle. I must lose money over it. I deserve something as recompense for that. Besides, I have already done something for my party! This will be the finishing touch."

He untied the pink tape as he spoke, and placed the first two chapters of the story in Miss Mallow's hand.

"It seems to me," she said, dropping for a moment into the comfortable writing chair and spreading the manuscript upon the table, "that it is iniquitous that members of the Royal family should do this kind of thing. Their books ought to be published for private circulation only. To the public, of course, it does not matter; they take a morbid delight in getting a peep into the workings of these august minds; it is struggling authors and those who have to make their living out of writing on whom it is so hard!"

"It is not a bad plot," said Dufferin, half apologetically. He was quite in accordance with the girl's sentiments; if "Madame Delilah" had been written by anyone else, more than the first three or four chapters would never have been read. He told her the outline of the story briefly, while she sat at the table turning over the leaves in her hand.

When he finished, she looked up.

"What an extraordinary thing," she exclaimed. "You remember that manuscript you gave me to read the other day, Val, and which you said began so well that you were sure it was quite worth reading? Well, that turns on much the same plot as you have been telling me. Precisely the same. And what is more it is a masterpiece; it is a book which is bound to sell, which will become famous. I meant to have told you before."

Dufferin shrugged his shoulders.

"It is hard on the author, whoever he may be—some absolutely unknown man, wasn't it?"

"It is hard on the Prince. I should say."

"Why, it won't make any difference to him."

"Yes, it will. The novel I read for you was written first; you will have to publish it and let the other go."

Dufferin laughed with a quiet amusement.

"I am afraid, Gwen, you are not a woman of business. The manuscript you have will not even be mentioned to the firm. It will simply be rejected with thanks."

Gwen's eyes flashed indignantly.

"And what excuse will you give?" she inquired, swinging round in the chair with an ironical lift of her pretty eyebrows.

"That—oh! Anything, don't you know? That it is not suitable, that the plot is not a new one."

The sound of the clock striking made the girl look up.

"Surely it is not so late as that! I must be going at once. I promised to meet father at the Lyceum punctually at eight."

She rose in sudden consternation at finding how the time had slipped by. Dufferin went across the room for her cloak. She forgot everything except that they were going to part.

In fastening her wrap his face came very near to hers.

She felt his warm breath on her cheek; she could almost hear his heart beating against hers. The next instant his arm had slipped round her waist and for one delicious, intoxicating moment their lips met. A minute later and she was gone.

Percival Dufferin closed the door behind her and went back to his desk.

For some time he sat thinking over his good fortune, his eyes closed and his legs stretched out under the table.

Then he roused himself, took up his pen, finished and sealed the letter he had been writing, and cast a look round the table preparatory to leaving off work for the night. In the mood he was in business was impossible.

Suddenly he leant across the desk and drew a pile of manuscript towards him. It was the story which he had given Gwendoline Mallow to read.

He took it up, glanced through the first chapters which he had already perused, and began reading with the extraordinary



He took it up.

rapidity which men who read much acquire.

At first he was merely amused at the similarity of the two plots; then he became interested and finally absorbed. He read on, forgetful of time, forgetful of his own dinner, oblivious to everything but the vivid style and the entrancing interest of the story.

Finally the last chapter was reached. The room seemed to have become close. There was perspiration on his forehead; yet when he turned round he found that the fire had burned down and was out.

"It is a pity," he said musingly. "Yet this will have to be wasted." He rose, and began pacing up and down the room. Finally he sat down at the piano and began to strum. In the interests of the firm he ought to reject the Prince's book. Yet to do that was to throw away everything which made life worth living; to ruin his own happiness.

Finally, he went back to the writing-table, scribbled a short note, and ringing for his servant, told him to take the manuscript round that night by hand. The sight of it was becoming obnoxious.

Then he remembered that he had had nothing to eat since lunch, sent for a cab, and drove round to the club for dinner in an exceedingly happy frame of mind!

The following evening Percival Dufferin went to call on the Mallows. It was a clear starlight evening, and as he was early in starting he decided to go via Hyde Park, on foot. As he strolled along his mind went back to the previous evening. His conscience had pricked him more than once during the day on the matter of the rejected manuscript. Yet he consoled himself with the thought that a poor novel by a member of the Royal family would possibly sell as well as a clever book by an

unknown author. It was weak comfort, but it assuaged the feeling of having betrayed his trust.

Very few people were about in the Park. As he emerged by the side of the Serpentine it was hard to realise that he was standing in the heart of the busiest city in the world. There was not a sound to be distinguished except the soft licks of the water against the sides of the little bridge at the eastern extremity of the lake. He rested here for a while, and presently became aware of someone who had risen from an iron seat a few hundred yards away, and was now standing gazing down into the water. By degrees the man came towards the bridge. Dufferin could not distinguish his face, but he saw that he was in rags, and his movements somehow raised his suspicions.

"If I was driven to sleeping out here," he thought, "I think I should be coward enough to put myself out of my misery."

Then he began to think what an unjust world it was which drove men to such extremities.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "this is a man of education and refinement. Perhaps he is even a genius, whom the world will not recognise. What numbers of capable men there are starving at the present moment."

All the time he was watching the man closely.

"Some people," he went on pursuing his own thoughts, "declare that a man must have some flaw if he cannot keep his head above water. That I do not believe. It may be the sins of the fathers visited upon the children; yet some men are haunted by ill-luck; some malign destiny seems to thwart them through life."

His reflections came to a sudden end.

Without a cry, without a sign of his intention, the melancholy stranger had suddenly plunged into the water. It did not take an instant for Dufferin to fling off his coat and dive from where he stood into the circling eddy which marked the spot where the man had sunk.

There was a short struggle in the water; the suicide fought with terrible despair for death. More than once Dufferin felt himself being drawn down in the clutches of this desperate man.

Finally he conquered.

The two men dripping from head to foot stood facing one another on the bank. By the light of the flickering gas-lamp Dufferin saw that this poor creature he had saved was little more than a boy; his face was white and thin, his eyes bloodshot.

They were both out of breath.

Presently the boy spoke.

"Why did you not let me drown?" he asked in a thick, husky voice. "I don't want to live. What is the use of living?"

Dufferin laid his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

"Some day you will thank me. No man, remember, has a right to put an end to his life. Existence is a debt which he owes to society."

The boy began to shiver. Dufferin himself felt a chill run through him.

"My rooms are near here," he said. "Come along and I will lend you something dry to put on."

The boy resisted. Dufferin became authoritative, and he yielded with a bad grace.

"What made you attempt to take your own life?" he asked as they walked rapidly towards his rooms.

The boy's teeth chattered.

"Because any death is better than starvation," he answered grimly.

By degrees Dufferin wormed his story from him. It

was the saddest and most pathetic story he had ever heard. The boy had been thrown out of work; he had attempted to gain employment and failed; there was an invalid mother at home, and a girl whom he loved. Things had gone from bad to worse. After a time his mother had died. His poverty became so awful that the last atom of self respect left him, and he no longer dared even to see his divinity. He wrote and told her that he was going away; that he would never come back again, and his letter must be farewell for ever.

In his rags no employer would look at him. His last chance of obtaining work had gone. Finally he had attempted to write a book, keeping himself by holding horses in the street.

"At college I had been the editor of the *Granta*," he said, with a sudden flash of pride as he noticed the look which unconsciously spread over Dufferin's face. "I knew I had it in me to write. This was my last hope. I sent the work into some publishers and waited. Two weeks passed, and I began to hope."

The voice broke off abruptly.

"Well? It may be all right still. Sometimes it is weeks before a publisher has time to read the MS. which is sent in to him."

"It came back last night—rejected."

Dufferin felt inexpressibly sorry for the boy.

"Do you think it was a good story?" he asked kindly. He wondered whether his unknown author had been in such a plight as this poor fellow.

"I thought it was; it seemed good to me."

"I tell you what," said Dufferin, "send it along to me. I am a publisher. Perhaps I might be able to help you. Opinions differ you know on the merits of a work."

The boy seized his hand in sudden gratitude. The tears sprang to his eyes and choked him. He attempted to say something, and broke down utterly.

"My name is Dufferin," the publisher went on, deeply moved by the other's emotion. "You may, perhaps, have heard of it."

"Ah!"

It was a cry almost of agony which broke from the boy's lips. Dufferin stood still, as if he had been shot. Perhaps a suspicion of the truth flashed through his mind.

"It was you who sent back my book."

Dufferin said afterwards that that was the supremest moment of his life, yet he did not hesitate an instant.

"What is your name?" he inquired gently.

"Murray."

"Your manuscript was not returned."

"It was, and a letter came with it from you."

"There must have been some mistake, that is all. Your book will be published as soon as we can set it up in type."

No one, perhaps, will ever know what that moment cost Percival Dufferin. He was acting on impulse. Yet he spoke deliberately—deliberately he swept away his whole future happiness; in a dozen words he banished for ever his hope of marrying the girl he loved.

After that he went on like a man in a dream.

At last his rooms were reached; he shook himself together, ordered two baths to be prepared, and arranged everything in his own bedroom that the boy could want.

Then he left him, and went just as he was, and sat down in his sitting-room, and covered his face with his hands, and strong man that he was, cried his heart out like a child.

Presently he looked up and discovered a letter lying on his blotting-pad. One glance, and he knew that it was Gwennie Mallow's writing.

He opened it mechanically.

It was perfumed slightly with violets, and the scent made him turn sick and faint. He pushed it away from him, his eyes were blurred, he could not see to read.

Presently a little slip of newspaper cutting inclosed in the envelope caught his attention.

Then he made another effort to read the letter; perhaps there was something which he might do for her.

It was quite a short note, written in the smooth running hand he knew so well.

"Dear Mr. Dufferin," it ran, "no doubt you will have seen the inclosed notice of Sir Henry Ornham's death in the evening papers. I am writing to you at once lest you should raise any false hopes upon it. I am free now, but I can never marry you. It may be ridiculous, indeed I know it is ridiculous, yet I can never bring myself to think of you as I did before, after last night. Your action in regard to the Prince ——'s novel is unjust and unfair, nor is it worthy of a gentleman. I do not know what strange opinion you have formed of me, nor can I imagine why you should have supposed that I would only marry someone who could give me a title. Believe me, the Mr. Dufferin I used to know will ever hold a place in my heart which Sir Percival Dufferin never will and never can. — Yours sincerely, G. MALLOW."

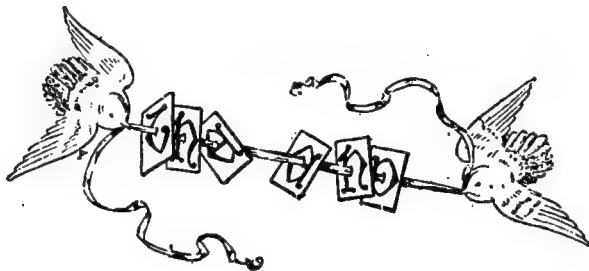
For a moment Dufferin sat rigid in his chair.

Then he rose slowly to his feet. His eyes were shining, and the old smile had come back to his lips. He crossed over the room and glanced at the clock.

"There is still time to go round there to-night," he said to himself.

And when he had changed his clothes he went round and took Murray with him to introduce the boy to the woman who had first found merit in his story.

ALDER CARR.



Count Volpatelli's Idea.

COUNT, that is a very good idea. I am sure we can carry it out admirably. It is new, and nothing takes as well as a novelty. Don't breathe a word about it to a soul. I won't even tell Ned. What fun it will be if he gets caught, too!"

"I'm charmed that you like it, Mrs. Browne," said Count Volpatelli, twirling his long, silky moustache and smiling on the pretty woman with his most "what-a-lovely-creature-you-are" manner. Count Volpatelli was a dapper little Italian, dark-eyed and olive-skinned. He spoke English fluently, but with a fascinating Neapolitan accent. Young Wallace Hinton had met him in Monte Carlo, and had made his sister, Mrs. Homer Binnington, take him up in Cannes—something that gave the little foreigner the *entrée* everywhere in that paradise of the elect. He was quite a success. He had such an unflagging vivacity and delightful courtesy, even where the silliest or the ugliest women were concerned. Perhaps he was not as indiscriminating as he seemed, but that only proved him the more clever.

Mrs. Browne had a large undertaking on her capable little hands. But she was a Napoleon in petticoats. At all events Cannes was going to be her Waterloo or her crown. This was the undertaking: to make English society on the Riviera accept her as a social somebody, and a pretty important somebody at that.

When she had applauded the idea Count Volpatelli suggested for her entertainment, and had predicted its success, because it was new, she had not reflected that not everything new is sure of scoring—new people, for instance. Mrs. Browne had no aspiration in the direction of the "New Woman." She wanted to range herself with the most conventional Old Woman. But she was very new.

She had just alighted at Society's caravansary, and was not quite certain what kind of rooms she was going to get. She aimed at a corner apartment on the ground floor. There was good reason to believe that she would "arrive" with a rush, for she was pretty, vivacious, adorably amiable, had a quick instinct for detecting the "right thing" and the proper way to do it, and could feel a social reef without having to run on it first. Then—important adjunct—she had Mr. Browne, her husband.

Ned Browne had inherited immense wealth from his father. So far as he cared, Society could have gone on to the end without his bothering about it. He had been a stranger to it, and would have remained outside its gates for ever without a flicker of discontent. But he was a good husband, and loved Mrs. Browne in a strong, simple, and rather obsolete fashion. Since she loved Society and wanted it, he was willing to pay whatever it would cost, and backed her loyally in her campaign against its stronghold.

The *musical*, to which Count Volpatelli had consented to add brilliancy by "doing a turn," was the first entertainment Mrs. Browne had ventured on. She had secured the best professional talent—through cheques. But she was loath that everything on the occasion should be "hired." By her bright cajoling ways she had coaxed several men of the smart set to do something for her, and now Count Volpatelli had given

his assistance. He had not done anything as an entertainer in Cannes before, which lent the more prestige to his appearance on this occasion. His idea had struck Mrs. Browne as quite up-to-date, and she was grateful to the good-natured little foreigner for helping her out.

She did not fail to play the Volpatelli card for all it was worth. It was such an original idea, this of the Count's. Oh, she couldn't tell what it was going to be. He had bound her to the most tremendous secrecy. But it would be a surprise to everybody. In which last assertion dear Mrs. Browne was positively Sybiline, if she had only known it.

Society had got so far towards letting in the Brownes as to accept invitations to their villa. The things to eat were always excellent, and there was a profusion of things to drink. It is astonishing how much this counts with people who are so plentifully fed. The passion for food is a lusty one in Society, and if there were more time between meals, it would probably have developed ruminants before this.

Mrs. Browne's invitations to attend functions were not as yet so numerous as to make it a difficult task to balance her engagement-book. But a number of the good men liked little Mrs. Browne, and helped her with their wives. So on the afternoon of the *musical* that lady had the delight of seeing her rooms so crowded as to be uncomfortable. It was a little crush. Most of the interest centred on Count Volpatelli's turn. He was sandwiched between Madame X—, of the opera, who sang "Les Filles de Cadix," and some selections by the orchestra.

The Count had arrived early, with a Gladstone bag that suggested an elaborate "make-up," and had carefully deposited it upstairs. Some time before his "turn" he himself disappeared in that upper region.

Expectation was on tip-toe. Women craned their necks to catch the earliest glimpse of him, and chatted volubly, making various conjectures as to what he would do. After a delay of some moments, as befitted the principal star's *entrée*, there was a burst of laughter, though there was a look of surprise on the faces of many at the Count's audacity. He, an Italian, and a nobleman, to actually appear at a *musical* as an—organ grinder!

For that is what came down the stairs, that and a thoroughly professional looking organ, and, perched on the torture-box, as much pleased by his *début* in polite society as the most artless of buds, a superannuated monkey. He had that air of withered vivacity and apprehensive vigilance that marks the Simian race.

But the Count was as cool as possible as he stolidly advanced and began to grind. He was beautifully made up, for the paint was thickly applied, and the short beard grew in a very sharp line from the cheeks. But his dark eyes were Volpatellian, despite the accentuated eyebrows. The Count wore gloves on his hands as if the difficulty of rendering those aristocratic members at all like an organ grinder's plebeian paws was too great to be even attempted.

The organ was the usual blatant, sharply rattling thing, and to add to the burlesque, Count Volpatelli ground it with a record-breaking velocity that made the

music ridiculous instead of merely painful—an improvement, of course.

"Why, you'd never recognise him," said Mrs. Strachan.

"The beard is a clever disguise, but nothing could ever deceive me about those eyes," replied Miss Anstruthers, with an air—the Count had been sentimentally disposed towards the young woman in question.

It was too funny, everybody thought it "so droll," and "so clever, don't you know," of the Count. Then the amusement increased when, at the end of the grind, the Count gravely sent round the monkey with a little red cap to collect. The women who had their purses dropped coins into the cap, and Miss Anstruthers, who had her *portemonnaie* irremediably lodged somewhere in the rear of her gown, below the waist line, playfully deposited a corsage bouquet of violets, as big as a cauliflower, in the cap.

The Count was applauded, and after some delay, responded, and to everybody's surprise, sang "Santa Lucia" with the most cheerful exaggeration of tone and intense bravura style. It was so realistic that some in the front row almost imagined they detected a flavour of garlic in the air.

Then the Count, organ, "monka," coin, and corsage violets all disappeared in a hansom.

"He is going home to take his make-up off," said Mrs. Browne, gaily. "We shall have to wait until the Casino dance this evening to congratulate him."

The *musical* was a great success, largely through Count Volpatelli's idea. Everybody thought it was very nice of him, to have so generously taken part.

Mrs. Browne had a small dinner party that evening, and after it the guests were to go to the Casino dance. When the vivacious little blonde went upstairs to dress, she began to think that perhaps the Count's scheme was not the very great success it had appeared. At least, not so far as she was concerned. She found that some of her choicest jewels were gone, as well as several gold-backed toilet articles, her watch, and a sum of money from her dressing-table.

She called the servant who had been on that floor during the afternoon, and asked if he had remained there all the time. He said he had not. Count Volpatelli had sent him with a note to some one, and he had been gone half an hour.

Mrs. Browne flew downstairs. She found her husband in his evening clothes, smoking a cigarette and reading the evening paper. What a position for a man to be in and have disaster fall upon him. But Mrs. Browne had to tell him, and she did so promptly.

"Ned," she said hurriedly, "my jewels, gold-backed toilet things, watch and money have all been stolen. That horrid organ-grinder must have taken them."

"What! The Count?" exclaimed her husband, sitting up very straight.

"Oh, the organ-grinder wasn't the Count," said Mrs. Browne plaintively. "He was a real organ-grinder, the regular thing."

"How did he get there?" demanded Mr. Browne.

"It was an idea of Count Volpatelli's, and I thought it so clever," said Mrs. Browne forlornly. "The Count saw this man in the street, and he said it would be such a lark to have him painted up and passed off for himself in disguise. Then, when people were all sold, we were going to tell them," added the wife of his bosom, looking rather foolish.

"Tell me all about it," Mr. Browne returned, with great interest.

"Why, that's all there is, Ned," Mrs. Browne answered

tearfully, "except that my things are stolen. It seems the Count had to send the servant out on a message, and that nasty organ man must have stolen the things. I'm afraid I've been a fool, Ned," said the poor little woman, contritely.

"So have I," he replied briskly. "But, my dear, it isn't the organ-grinder," he added quickly. "It's the noble Count. To think of a little, sunny, oily Italian doing us like that!" He grinned, despite himself.

"Oh, Ned!" cried Mrs. Browne, "not Count Volpatelli. How can you think it was he?"

"Why, you little goose, the organ-grinder went off after the concert was over and he had no bag. Count Volpatelli sent our man away on this imaginary message, and then took the things. Don't say a word about it to anyone," he added, briskly getting to his feet. "Get ready and go to the dance, and I'll look up the Count and the organ man. Don't fret too much about it. I'm as big a goose as you. I lent the Count a cool £500 yesterday, because his remittance hadn't come, or some such tomfoolery. Go to the dance, just the same, and not a word to a soul."

"It will be lovely explaining this joke, Ned," said Mrs. Browne. "Miss Anstruthers will be so pleased to know that she bestowed her violets on a real, live, horrid, garlicky, Italian organ-grinder. She knew the Count's eyes, you know, though he was so beautifully made up!"

Mr. Browne drove at once to Count Volpatelli's lodgings. He was not surprised to find that he was not there. The servant said that he had taken his dress clothes with him when he went out in the afternoon, as he meant to dine out, and then go to the Casino ball. He hurried to the Casino and discovered that the Count was not there, and had not been there. A man who was rather friendly with the Count said he had received a note from him saying that owing to a telegram he had received he had been obliged to suddenly leave Cannes for Paris.

Mr. Browne betook himself to the police headquarters, and engaged the services of two detectives to pursue the Count. On his return he discovered the nobleman's assistant, the veritable organ-grinder. He was pretty well convinced, from his story, that there was no collusion on the man's part. He said Count Volpatelli had hired him to play at the *musical*, and had him painted up, so that he would look something like him. The Count had suggested to him sending the "monka" round, and had generously allowed him to keep the contributions. The Count had given him a louis for his services, and he had not seen him since.

"He nica man," said the simple son of Italy gratefully.

"Very," said Mr. Browne heartily. "So generous—with other people's things. Oh! what did you do with the bouquet of violets?" he asked.

"Me solda for fifty cents. Vary beeg," said the grinder, with a child-like smile.

"The 'monka' is the only one in the trio that didn't make anything out of the job," thought Browne to himself.

Though it cost money to do it, the Count was overtaken and the stolen things recovered. Then Browne was inclined to let him get out of the country, but Mrs. Browne would not hear of it.

"How cruel you women are!" expostulated Browne. "I've heard you say 'the Count' was such a 'charming fellow.'"

"So he was," replied Mrs. Browne, with energy; "and that is why I want him imprisoned."

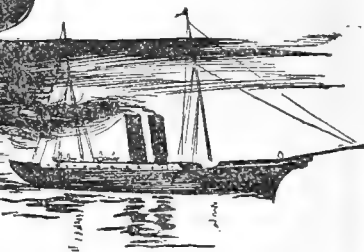
The Brownes never explained the joke, though keeping it quiet was the most expensive item of the *musical*.

LE VIER.

THE

QUEEN of NIGHT

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By HEADON HILL,

(Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective,"
"The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.)

SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives to Sir Simon Crawshaw an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking the regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht, *Queen of Night*.

Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshaw, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night*! On going aboard he is introduced to Dr. Zavertal, among whose patients are Miss Challenor, the Earl of Durransmore (a boy of fourteen coming into £40,000 a year), and Desmond Orlebar, whose death however occurs when off Gibraltar.

A stowaway is discovered and put ashore. A well-known detective, Kennard, travelling as an American, "Gen. Waldo," reveals himself to Captain Forrester, and imparts his suspicions. At Genoa a passenger comes aboard, whose voice Forrester immediately recognises as that of the stowaway.

CHAPTER XII.

ENTRAPPED.

As to Vizard's identity with the stowaway there was no doubt in my mind at all. His height and build were similar, and, allowing for the difference caused by the bushy, black hair and whiskers which "Enriquez" had worn, the features I now saw were the same. In the wisdom that comes after the event I wondered that I had not recognised him before, but it was the voice that did it.

With difficulty I forced myself to give him a civil answer, having no wish in Aline's presence to demand the explanation I meant to have from him, and luckily he relieved me from the need for further caution by almost immediately going below to see the chief-steward about his berth.

One thing was very certain—whether there was anything in Kennard's graver charges or no, the *Queen of Night* was too full of petty mystery for my liking, and I made up my mind there and then to have an end of it. My discovery of Vizard's peculiar conduct in coming aboard as a stowaway after booking a passage would furnish me with a quite legitimate excuse for raising the question of his relations with Zavertal, and after the rumpus that was sure to ensue I hoped that the air would be cleared all round by a disclosure of anything that was not on the square.

Being detained over some trifle I was a little late for dinner that night, and when I entered the saloon the company was already seated. Here and there at the tables there were a few gaps, owing to several of the passengers preferring to dine on shore, and I was somewhat disturbed to see that both Zavertal's and "General Waldo's" chairs were empty.

In view of my approaching interview with Vizard, I was particularly anxious to see and consult Kennard, the more so as the verification of his prophecy that I should hear more of the stowaway within forty-eight hours, seemed to indicate that he understood far better than I what was going on. Though he had no knowledge of Vizard, he must have foreseen that the stowaway would come round from Barcelona to Genoa by rail, and make another attempt to board the ship.

Without in any degree shaking my conviction as to his identity, one fact with regard to Vizard filled me with a sense of the difficulty of the task before me. He seemed to be well-known to at least a dozen of the passengers, and from the remarks made by some of those near me, I gathered that he was an enormously wealthy man, and quite a personage in London society. This made no difference to my intention to have it out with him after dinner. He had pointed a pistol at my boat's crew, and he had threatened me personally—eccentricities, which, so long as I commanded the ship, I did not mean to go unpunished, no matter how powerful the perpetrator; but I foresaw that his popularity and position might place serious obstacles in the way of getting rid of him.

If he denied having come aboard as a stowaway, people would be more likely to believe him than me; while, if he admitted it lightly, as having been done as a practical joke, I would probably be expected to pass it over. And that was just what I would rather chuck up the command than do.

During dinner I watched Vizard closely as he chatted easily with a London banker and his wife, next whom he had secured a seat, on the ground of previous acquaintance. He gave me the impression of having an iron will, and his face, in repose, I thought would be a cruel one, but, as it always appeared to be covered with a stereotyped "Society" smile, I had no chance of fathoming its capacity of expression. I was glad that he sat at the other table, and that I was not called upon to converse with him, for once or twice I caught him eyeing me in a way that was almost a challenge. Indeed, it seemed as if he were actually courting recognition, so obviously did he seek to meet my gaze.

As soon as the saloon was cleared, instead of joining the passengers on deck, I went straight to my room, and, ringing up my own steward, sent him to ascertain whether either Doctor Zavertal or "General Waldo" or both had returned to the ship. In each case the answer was in the negative. Without a moment's hesitation, for the man's covertly, defiant bearing in the saloon had put my back up, I despatched the steward to Vizard with "Captain Forrester's compliments, and he would be glad if he would come to the Captain's room." Then I sat down and waited, full of righteous indignation, and determined to command my own ship.

In less than two minutes there was a tap at the door and

Vizard stepped into the cabin. His smile had vanished, leaving his face very hard and stern; but though he looked alertly expectant he showed no traces of the surprise which a passenger suddenly summoned to the Captain's cabin in such a high-handed way would naturally have felt if ignorant of the cause. This strengthened me in the accusation I was going to make, and I spoke with confidence.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Vizard," I said, "because I recognised you the moment you came on board this evening. What do you mean by shipping as a stowaway, and then, when I land you as such, by threatening my crew and myself with a revolver?"

"It is always open to a man to place his own constructions on the actions of another," was the reply, spoken sneeringly, which almost took my breath away. It was tantamount to an admission, and his manner had nothing of the practical joker about it. I felt that whatever his motive had been, whatever his schemes were, that they had been conceived and carried out in grim earnest.

"And the constructions that I put upon your conduct, sir, are such that I decline to take you as a passenger," I replied hotly. "The steward shall render you every assistance, but a boat will be ready to take you and your baggage ashore in fifteen minutes."

The notice to quit was received with a sarcastic bow.

"It has not dawned upon you, my worthy Captain, that the constructions which your owners may put upon your conduct in forcibly landing a passenger whom they have contracted to carry, may cause them to dispense with your services?" he said.

"Hang the owners!" I retorted; and I remembered afterwards the curious smile with which he heard the expletive. "If you can settle it that way with them, do so by all means. I wouldn't sail under owners who would back up a masquerading mountebank of a stowaway—no matter what his position—against their Captain. Come, sir, you'd best go and see to your things. The boat will be manned and ready on the port side in ten minutes, now."

"Very well, I'll go," he replied, drawing himself up to his full height and turning to the door, but pausing on the threshold to say: "You alleged just now that I threatened you at Barcelona. Do you recollect the words of my threat?"

I wanted no more truck with him, so merely nodded.

"Then, speaking entirely without prejudice, you can consider those words as still in force, and as exactly defining the position," he said, as he left the cabin.

Ten minutes later I had the satisfaction of seeing him into the boat, which I took care was not manned by any of the crew who had put him ashore at Barcelona. The third mate went in charge, and I gave him a hint that he had a tough customer to deal with, and had better slip a pistol

into his pocket. I was curious to see if Vizard would make any protest or explanation before the passengers, but, so far as I know, he held no communication with anyone from the time of leaving the Captain's room to that of going over the side. As the boat shot out into the darkness towards the twinkling lights of the city, he waved his hand jauntily to me and I heard him laugh.

In half an hour the boat returned, and the third officer reported that Vizard had given him no trouble whatever. He had not alluded to the circumstances under which he was being put ashore, but had chatted civilly on trifles, and had finished up by giving the boat's crew a sovereign to drink his health. On the part of such a man, this complacency struck me as ominous. Naples was our next port of call, and I determined to keep a good look out for him there.

For the moment, however, I was rid of the undesirable passenger, and I was free to turn my attention to a matter of more immediate interest. This was the non-return of Zavertal, who, when I turned in at eleven o'clock, was still absent from the ship. Kennard, also, was still on shore, but from what he had said I regarded this as merely a consequence of the Doctor's absence; and, in any case, as a passenger, he was entitled to a freedom of action which was hardly the privilege of an officer paid to discharge medical

duties. To my mind, the Doctor's conduct in spending the night on shore without leave constituted, to say the least of it, a breach of discipline, though whether, in the peculiar organisation sanctioned by the owners, he would consider it so, was doubtful.

In the morning he was still absent, and at ten o'clock I had heard nothing of him or of his "shadow," though they were both aware that the ship was to proceed on her voyage at noon. Another half-hour passed, and I was thinking of sending on shore to the Hotel de Genes, which Zavertal had mentioned as the place of meeting with his friend, when a shoreboat came alongside, bringing a letter addressed to me in his handwriting. Tearing it open, I read as follows:

British Consulate,
Genoa,

June 24th, 18—.

DEAR CAPTAIN FORRESTER,

I am detained here in an

extremely awkward dilemma, from which your presence can alone extricate me.

May I beg of you on receipt of this to come ashore at once to the Consulate, where you will find me anxiously awaiting you. The affair will not take long to settle, and there is no reason why the sailing of the ship should be delayed if you act at once.

Yours respectfully,

LUCIUS ZAVERTAL.

There was only one thing to be done, and that was to go and get him out of pawn, whatever his trouble might be, or, failing that, to secure the services of another medical officer. For a pleasure-cruiser with between two and three



*Towards the twinkling lights
of the city.*

hundred people on board, many of them considering themselves invalids, to put to sea without a doctor would be an impossibility. The boat that had brought the letter was still alongside, and I decided to go in her in preference to waiting while my gig was manned. After informing the chief-officer of the contents of Zavertal's letter I put a sum of money in my pocket in case of need, and went towards the boat. On my way along the deck I met Aline, and told her that I was going to fetch the Doctor, who had been detained by business on shore.

"I wish you would leave him behind, then, Cyril," she said. "I cannot bear that man."

"Why—what has he been doing?" I asked, in some surprise, for I had noticed that Zavertal had been particularly civil and deferential to her and Mrs. Brinkworth.

"Oh, nothing very much; only he is always pestering me to take his medicines when I am perfectly well, and don't require them," she replied.

This piece of information was so new, and moreover fitted in so compactly with the horrid thought that had crossed my mind as to Zavertal's possible reasons for mentioning the three "serious cases" that it occupied me all the way to the landing-place. Taken in conjunction with the Doctor's strange detention at the Consulate, the only conclusion I could deduce from it was that Kennard had made some important discovery which had warranted his applying to the authorities; but how Zavertal could suppose that I should be either willing or able to liberate him under such circumstances was beyond my understanding.

The two nimble Italian boatmen made short work of the distance, and I was soon walking across the Piazza Cavour to the Consulate. From my early studies of detective literature I had half expected to see Kennard hanging about the door in his disguise, but he was nowhere visible. Only the usual stream of ships' captains, seamen, and merchants' clerks jostled each other going and coming through the swing-doors leading into the waiting-room of one of the busiest consulates in Europe. On my entrance I wrote my name and business so far as it was describable on a slip, and gave it to an attendant, who vanished with it into another room, to return almost immediately with the welcome news that the Consul would see me at once. A moment later I was ushered into the presence of Her Majesty's representative.

My first impulse on entering was to look round for Zavertal, but a glance showed that there was no one in the private room besides the Consul himself, seated at his desk, and a clerk writing at a side table. Curbing my surprise, I pulled myself together in time to return the official's salutation.

"You have called, Captain Forrester, in consequence of a communication from your medical officer, I think?" the Consul said, and I remembered afterwards the look of keen inquiry with which he eyed me.

"Yes; I understood that Doctor Zavertal was here," I replied.

"So he is; you will see him presently," returned the Consul. "There is a matter about which I want to question

you first. A gentleman, named Vizard, has been here to lodge a complaint against you, Captain, for refusing to carry him on your steamer, although he has paid his fare. He says you accused him of having been a stowaway from London to Barcelona, or something of the kind."

"And so he was, sir," I replied. "Why, he as good as admitted it last night. There is no doubt he is the same man whom I landed. If Doctor Zavertal is here, he should be able to corroborate me."

"Doctor Zavertal has already seen Mr. Vizard," said the

Consul curtly. "One more question. Have you any accusation or charge to make against the Doctor?"

From the Consul's tone and manner I guessed that Zavertal had taken sides against me, by pretending to fail in recognising Vizard as Enriquez. I began to have an uneasy feeling that something had been got up for me, and this so raised my gorge that I answered rashly.

"Not exactly an accusation—at least, not yet," I

blurted out. "But I believe him to be a scheming underhand scoundrel. I cannot put it in words, but I only know that the ship has been chock full of mysteries and disguises and conspiracies ever since she left port, and they can all be traced to this man."

"Ah, that about settles it, then," said the Consul decisively. "If you will step in there, Captain, you will find that I have arrived at a practical solution of the difficulties that are worrying you."

He pointed to a baize-covered door at the opposite end of the room from that at which I had entered, and in my anxiety for a speedy settlement of the Vizard affair I made for it in all haste, my impression being that it would lead to an inner apartment where I should perhaps find the other parties to the controversy in which I was now apparently involved. Directly I opened the door I saw by a wall four feet in front of me that I was mistaken. The place in which I found myself was a narrow passage, passing the door in each direction to the right and left. Before I could note more a number of faces closed in upon me on either hand, I was violently seized by strong arms, a pungent cloth was pressed to my nostrils, and I felt myself becoming quickly powerless in mind and body.

But, as my senses left me, the last definite objects presented to my fading sight were the features of Vizard and Zavertal, standing out distinct and triumphant among the crowd of olive-skinned, unknown faces that hemmed me in on every side. Then I struggled hard, but my limbs refused to answer to my will, my ears buzzed and roared like the engines of a tramp steamer, darkness and silence swooped down upon me, and I knew no more.

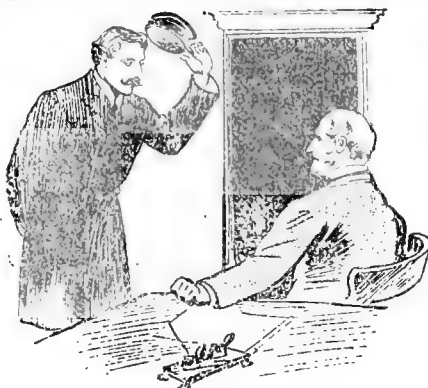
CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONVENT OF SANTA LUCIA.

WHEN I came back to consciousness I was lying on my back on a dirty bed in a stone cell some twelve feet long by six across, and my returning senses took shape slowly in



I was violently seized by strong arms.



Ushered into the presence of Her Majesty's representative.

the process of counting the bars in an iron grated window high up in the wall at my side. How long I had lain there I had no means of knowing. A stray sunbeam flickering through the dusty glass of the window told me that it was daytime, and that was all. As recollection grew upon me, I moved my limbs to see if I was bound, and I rejoiced in a dim and misty sort of way to find that within the narrow compass of my prison at least I was free.

But that was the extent of my self-gratulation. When I remembered the scene at the Consulate, and the manner of my forcible capture, I gnashed my teeth with impotent fury to think that Zavertal and Vizard, about whose co-operation there could no longer be any doubt, had bested me with such ease. Whatever their objects might be, they had evidently seen that I was hostile and suspicious, and they had got me deposed from the command by some ruse by which the Consul had been made the unconscious abettor of their villainy. By this time the *Queen of Night* had probably proceeded on her voyage in charge of another captain, and the thought maddened me that Aline was on board, ignorant or misinformed of what had befallen me, and with those two unscrupulous villains at hand free to carry out whatever devilry was in their minds.

These considerations quite outweighed the disgust I felt at the treatment to which I had been subjected, but after a while I began to wonder what colourable pretext my enemies could have offered to the Consul to induce him to sanction their conduct. Of course I never doubted that he had been duped; but a terribly strong case must have been presented to him, I thought, for him to permit violence to be used against a British subject within the walls of the Consulate. With what crime was I charged? Again, however heinous that crime might be, why that extraordinary method of arrest? I had no previous experience of Italian justice, but I could not believe that it was usual to chloroform prisoners in order to make them "go quietly."

My mind having cleared sufficiently to reason thus, the impulse took me to try and ascertain whether I was really in prison or no. The place of my confinement certainly warranted no other supposition. The walls and floor were of stone, the door massive and nail-studded, and the window was placed so high that its lattice of iron bars could only have been intended to prevent escape, not accident. Having no means of filing the bars, flight by that route was out of the question, but I thought that by standing on the bed and making an upward spring it was just possible that I might reach the inner sill of the window, and hang on long enough to obtain a view of the outside surroundings.



I was lying on my back on a dirty bed.

At the second attempt I was successful. My fingers got a grip on the stone sill, and, by dint of pulling up my own weight, I managed to raise my head sufficiently high to look out. I saw an old and tangled garden surrounded by stone

walls, and with nothing more human-like in it than here and there a broken statue peeping through the matted undergrowth. The paths and terraces were moss-grown and uncared for. Beyond the far boundary wall the ground sloped upwards, and I could see that it was quite country, and only sparsely studded with large houses at considerable intervals.

Having noted that my window was about twenty feet from the ground, I dropped back into my cell, the wiser only by the negative

theory that my place of confinement was not a prison. The neglected condition of the garden precluded the idea that the place was a Government establishment of any kind, and the situation tended to prove that it was not the gaol. I judged from the country beyond the walls that I was somewhere on the rising foothills at the back of the city, whereas the gaol was in the central and thickly built-over district of the Via Garibaldi. Such were the thoughts that were running through my mind.



Three stalwart Italians.

Further reflection was cut short by the sound of approaching footsteps followed by the clanking of bolts and chains. A moment later the door opened, admitting three stalwart Italians, whose appearance at once put an end to any lingering notion that I might be in a legal prison. If I had been held captive by brigands in a mountain fastness I could not have had guardians who more thoroughly looked the part than the greasy, ragged, garlic-smelling rascals who crowded into the narrow cell.

They all carried oak cudgels, which, judging from the ferocious glances they shot at me, they would use with very little provocation. Separately I could have easily tackled any one of them, but the number put all idea of attacking them out of my head at once, especially as I did not know how many of the same sample might be within beck and call.

One fellow carried a bowl of stew, and another a stone jar half filled with country wine. These they deposited on the floor, one of them saying, with a gesture:

"Deener—Signor eat deener."

This denoted a modified knowledge of English, and I at once broke into a torrent of protest and inquiry—where was I, why had I been so treated, was I free to go away?

At the last question the spokesman laughed, and answered the first question as though it comprised a reply to the others:

"This the Convent—the Convent of Santa Lucia," he said.

This conveyed nothing, and when I pressed him further he refused to say why I had been brought there and in whose keeping I was. The only piece of information he vouchsafed increased my anxiety and dismay. On my demanding to be taken instantly to the British Consul, the man replied insolently:

"Consul come here see Signor in one week. No use making fuss before."

"Is there anyone named Zavertal or Vizard, in this confounded place?" I asked.

But he only shook his head vacantly, and, again pointing to the wretched food, withdrew with his companions, bolting the door behind them. I was too excited to be hungry, but, recognising the necessity of preserving my strength, I ate some of the mess and drank all the wine, after which I sat down on the bed—not to despair, but to think out some way of escape. That my capture was in some degree sanctioned by authority I concluded from the man's statement that the Consul would visit me in a week.

That was so far reassuring, as showing that I was not in the hands of professed criminals, but it also spurred me to endeavour to free myself, seeing that the only person who could help me would not be accessible for seven long weary days. To remain shut up for that time, in doubt as to what those two scheming villains were up to, and with that ever-haunting fear about Aline hanging over me, was not what I meant to endure.

I had sat there brooding for an hour or more, when again I heard the tramp of approaching footsteps. On the door being opened two people—both strangers to me—came in, while outside were clustered the three men whom I had seen before. The two men who entered were quite of a different stamp, and my heart bounded when I saw that one of them was dressed in the garb of an English clergyman. His companion was a big, lank-haired Italian, elderly and of pompous manners; but he had the air of being a person of education, and in authority. He seemed to search my face with a keen scrutiny, and then falling back a pace or two he said a few words in Italian as he motioned his companion forward.

The clergyman was spare and ascetic-looking, and he proceeded to address me in an irritating, unctuous voice. "I am the new English chaplain here," he said. "Need I say



The two men who entered were of quite a different stamp.

with what heartiness I shall place my ministrations and advice at your disposal. I have called to see you in the exercise of my duty at the special request of the Consul."

"You are very kind," I replied—in, I fear, a thank-you - for - nothing tone, "but I should prefer to see the Consul himself. The only service anyone can render me at present is to tell me why I am detained in this hole, and to get

me out of it as quickly as is possible."

The clergyman sighed a professional sigh. "Those are matters that are quite beyond my province, I am afraid," he whined in the nauseous hypocritical twang that was fast making me hate him. "Any spiritual consolation, now? Or the loan of a nice book to read? In either of those ways I shall be so privileged to administer to your wants."

In the doorway the pompous authoritative person, evidently ignorant of English, was having our conversation mutilated to him by the greasy tatterdemalion who had a smattering. The man's whispering, therefore, overlapped the last sentence by twenty seconds, and under cover of this the parson, catching my eye, added quickly, whispering himself with great earnestness:—

"I am here to help you. Appear angry and drive me away, but take the book I shall offer you."

With difficulty controlling my delight sufficiently to seize

the cue, I reviled him so vigorously for an unsympathetic humbug, unwilling to aid a fellow-countryman in distress,



He retreated to the door.

that the translator threw up his hands in despair. The effect upon the clergyman was even more marked. Uttering feeble protests, he retreated to the door, where he nearly fell into the arms of the Italians who rallied to his assistance. But checking the onslaught they seemed about to make upon me, he ventured back a little way into the cell and laid upon the bed a book which he had been carrying under his arm. This being safely accomplished, he beat a second retreat, pulling the door to after him, and then I heard the bolts shot and the footsteps of my visitors departing.

The moment the sounds died away I sprang up and clutched the book, which was a rather bulky volume, bound in cloth, with red edges. Directly my fingers closed upon it I knew that it was no book, but a dummy, forming a box, of which one of the covers was the lid. Wrenching it open, I could hardly repress a cry of exultation, for neatly packed in the interior was a silken cord, slight, but strong enough to bear the weight of a man's body, a file, a small chisel, and a half-sheet of note-paper, on which were scrawled the following welcome lines:

"Zavertal has been too clever for us, but I shall beat him yet. In case you do not know, you are in the Convent of Santa Lucia, which is used as a private mad-house. I bring you means of escape. Make the attempt to-night, an hour after sunset. I shall wait for you at the right-hand angle of the far garden wall, outside. The ship has sailed, with McIntyre in command, but if you get away to-night we can pick her up at Naples. No time to write more, as I have to devise means of getting to you somehow. Explanations when we meet.

"KENNARD."

(To be continued.)

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THE MISERY OF CORPULENCY

A copy has come to hand of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), the clever little volume which, more than anything else, has brought a revolution in the treatment of obesity. That the still larger circulation implied by the issue of the new edition of this popular work is necessary is proved by such a paragraph as the following. It appears among the answers to correspondents in the "Dress and Fashion" column of a Sunday newspaper with a large circulation: "MISERABLE.—A young girl of 18 ought not to have such a large stomach that no dress looks well. Perhaps you require exercise and dieting." The helpless vagueness of this reply to a young girl who is naturally "miserable" on account of her unseemly obesity is a sufficient evidence that Mr. Russell does well in seeking to make known, even more widely than they are at present, the simplicity, the efficiency, the rapidity, and the delightful surroundings of his treatment for the reduction of superabundant fat. The young girl in question, who might exercise and diet herself for months without any appreciable improvement, may easily learn to imitate the example of thousands of ladies of all ages, who, by the use of Mr. Russell's pure vegetable preparation, have reduced their weight at the rate of pounds per week, and sometimes (but only when necessary, for the working of the cure is virtually automatic, stopping its effects when the normal limit is reached) stones per month. She may acquire this open secret—for the author makes no mystery about the ingredients of his recipe, by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when a copy of the book will be sent post free. If she follows his instructions, "Miserable," without any fasting regimen, and without excessive exercise, will find herself being quickly reduced to shapely proportions, with an improved appetite, and full liberty to gratify it.

LONGEVITY AND CORPULENCY.

We have received a copy of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). This issue is in itself indicative of the widespread influence which the author now exercises as a successful expert in the treatment of obesity, while the additions to the evidence which, as a statistician, he is in the habit of collecting on the subject are suggestive of some curious reflections. It is evident that Mr. Russell is annually treating thousands of cases of excessive fat with a success which, in the rapidity and the permanence of its manifestation is truly marvellous. That the enormous popularity of his system is likely to increase in the future is most probable, because it is free from all the drawbacks which have rendered the Banting and other methods of reducing corpulence unacceptable to the majority of the sufferers, who have regarded these cures as rather worse than the complaint. By attacking the causes rather than the symptoms of obesity, he strengthens the digestive organs, thus actually increasing, instead of decreasing, the appetite, while the surplus weight is being reduced at a wonderfully rapid rate, amounting to pounds per week, and often stones per month. Add to this that there is no mystery about the nature of the absolutely innocuous preparation, the recipe for which Mr. Russell supplies in his capital little volume (256 pages), which may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to the author's offices, at the address given above. It seems certain, therefore, that, as a result of the happy revolution which the patient research of this specialist, with the aid of a distinguished physician as a collaborateur, has effected, the average of longevity will, before long, be appreciably raised. Obesity is, indeed, one of the few antagonistic influences remaining which, especially among the more prosperous classes, prevent the great majority of people of both sexes becoming centenarians. With advanced ideas in regard to wholesome food, clothing, and sanitary arrangements, it only remains to get rid of clogging fat to live an ideally hygienic, and therefore, a very prolonged life.

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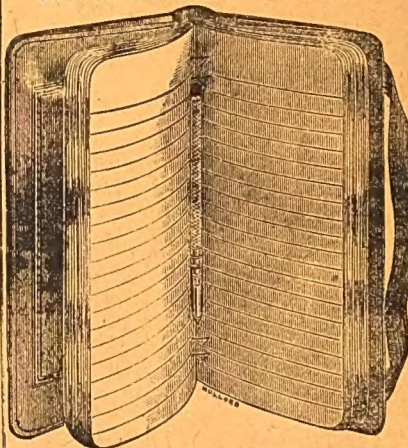
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